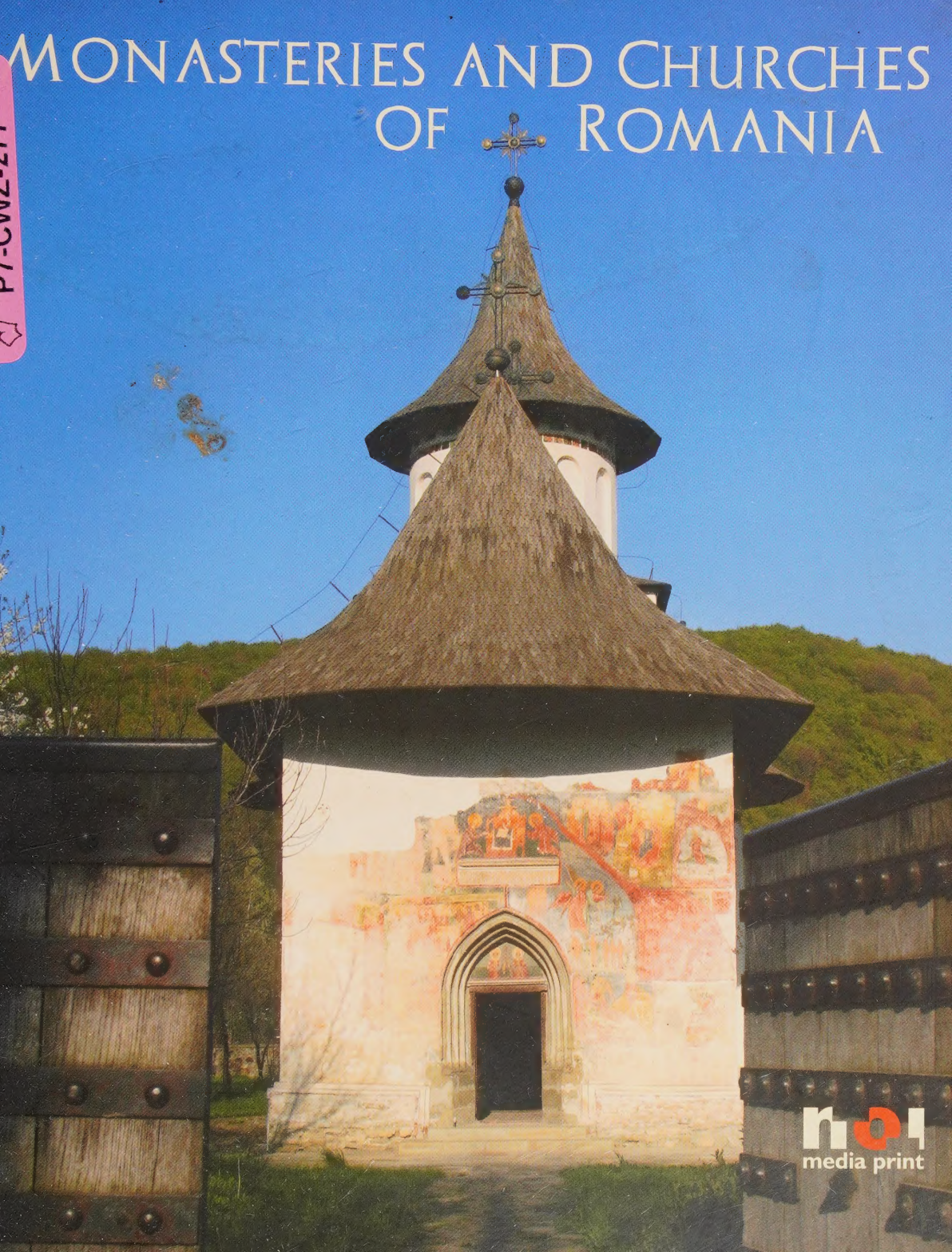
MONASTERIES AND CHURCHES OF ROMANIA



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MONASTERIES AND CHURCHES OF ROMANIA

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MONASTERIES AND CHURCHES
OF ROMANIA

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Monastic Life, History, Art and Culture in the Romanian Monasteries

The first monasteries came into being in Egypt in the late Third Century and early Fourth Century. In the beginning, the monks (from the Greek *monos* "alone") separated into two groups: some lived in solitude, others in communities or *koinobia*. The hermits or anchorites took as their teacher St Anthony the Great, while the coenobites first gathered around St Pachomius, whose "angelic image" was revealed by an angel, as we can see in the fresco that adorns the wall of the narthex. It was St Basil the Great (330-379) who regulated the monastic life: it is from him that Orthodox monks take the name of Basilians (in the Christian East there are no monastic orders or congregations, unlike in the West). There followed the great monastic teachers Ss John Climacus († 649), John Damascene (657-749), Theodosius the Coenobiarch (759-826) and Theodore the Studite (1002-1074), the hêgumen, or abbot, of the Studios Monastery in Constantinople, who added study to prayer and physical work. Another important moment in the history of monasticism was the founding of the first monastery on Mount Athos by St Athanasius the Athonite († 1003).

As Romanian and other researchers have shown, Ss John Cassianus (360-433) and his compatriot Dionysius Exiguus, or "the Lesser", were born in Dobrudja: they are the forefathers of today's Romanian monks. At Basarabi in Dobrudja, during the Eleventh Century, there was a monastic settlement, as is attested by the ruins of basilicas and rupestrian cells, which can still be seen today. The first Romanian monastery to be mentioned in historical records is the Monastery of St Michael of Peri-Maramures, dependent upon the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and dating from the Fourteenth Century. It was St Nicodemus († 1406), founder of Voditza and Tismana who organised monasticism in the Romanian Land and established the first monasteries. His disciples built Cozia Monastery (1391), whose church still survives to this day, and which is one of the oldest continuous monastic foundations. It was also at Cozia that Filos, the former logothete of Mircea the Old, dwelled, becoming Philotheus the monk, thought to be the first Romanian poet. The first Romanian monasteries were influenced not only by Mount Athos but also other monasteries in the Balkans, with which uninterrupted ties have been maintained down the centuries.

In Transylvania and the Banat, the monasteries of Morisena (Eleventh Century), Hodos-Bodrog (Twelfth Century), Cuhea of Maramures (Fourteenth Century), and Vad (Fifth Century), Voievozi-Bihor (Sixteenth Century) were built. The church of the Rîmet Monastery, as we learn from an inscription dating from the late Fourteenth Century, was painted by Mihul from Crisul Alb, the earliest *zographos* whose name has been preserved.

The line of monastic foundations continues in the following centuries, in the Romanian Land (Wallachia), Transylvania and Moldavia.

In Moldavia, Neamtz Monastery, traditionally regarded as the oldest monastic foundation, was followed by Moldovitza and Probota. It was also in Moldavia that monk Grigorie Tzamblak wrote "The Life and Martyrdom of St. John the New of Suceava" in the Fifteenth Century. The cultural and artistic role of the above-mentioned monasteries and of the others that would later be built is widely recognised.

In the Fifteenth Century, not only the monasteries of Govora, Bistritza (Vîlcea), Moldovitza and Humor were built in Moldavia, but also Capriana and Varzaresti over the Prut River. However, the pre-eminent monastery from this century is Putna, founded by St Stephen the Great, who was also the founder of Voronetz and Patrauti Monasteries and of the monastery churches of Tazlau and Dobrovat, all built in the Moldavian style. Although Stephen the Great was long regarded as the most prolific founder of Romanian monasteries, it was Matei Basarab who built the most churches and monasteries. It is also in this epoch that the first musical and illuminated manuscripts appear, liturgical objects whose calligraphy and ornamentation were crafted by monks.

In the early Sixteenth Century, the church of the Dealu Monastery was built, and also the renowned foundation of Neagoe Basarab at Curtea de Arges, which at its consecration in 1517, on the Feast of St Mary, brought together the Patriarch of Constantinople, bishops and clergy from the entire Orthodox world. In the first half of the century, the Cozia infirmary was built, regarded as an architectural jewel of the epoch, thereby adding another dimension to monastic life: the shelter and healing of those in suffering. Besides princes, numerous boyars, abbots and monks likewise built or rebuilt monasteries and monastery churches, both in Wallachia and Moldavia.

Among the great founders, Peter Rares occupies an eminent place. He built Probota and Moldovitza, and it was in his reign that exterior mural painting acquired an amplitude never before seen in the world. The interior murals of Romanian monastery churches have been preserved and lend fame to those times, while the exterior murals attract visitors from all over the world, with Bukowina being the region most sought by those interested in ecclesiastical art.

In the latter half of the Sixteenth Century, Slatina and Galata were built, and Sucevitza at the end of the century. They were followed by the matchless Dragomirna, where the illuminated manuscripts of Metropolitan Anastasius Krimka, its founder, are preserved to this day.

Besides prayer, work and study, the monks continued to paint murals and icons, embroider liturgical vestments, and write chronicles and codices preserved to our times.

Mentioning Matei Basarab once again, let us list just a few of his foundations: Arnota, Caldarusani, Plataresti, Brebu, Negru-Voda, Plumbuita, Brancoveni. Martyred prince St Constantine Brancoveanu founded Hurezi Monastery, unquestionably the most representative monastic complex in Romania. We are not thinking merely of spiritual and artistic accomplishments, but also of the only monastery library to have been preserved down to the present day. Along with other foundations of Constantine Brancoveanu, the monastery is representative of the style that bears his name, a style originated by the master craftsmen of his epoch and guided by the confessor of the prince, John the Archimandrite. The Monastery of Sambata de Sus, near Fagaras, is also a Brancoveanu foundation, thereby revealing the unbroken ecclesiastical links that existed between the Principalities.

Another great founder was Vasile Lupu, builder of the Monastery of the Three Hierarchs in Jassy, whose stone ornamentation is unique.

The Seventeenth Century represents a crucial moment in the history of old Romanian culture. The Balgrad New Testament (1648) and the Bucharest Bible (1688) were printed, and the Church Fathers, polemical, homiletic and hagiographic works were translated. It is also form this period that the first Slavic-Romanian Lexicon, that of Mardarius the Cozian, has been preserved in manuscript. During this epoch, the first colleges and academies came into being, at which Romanian monks and Greek scholars taught.

Of equal importance were the monasteries built in the Eighteenth Century, such as Vacaresti, in its day the largest in the Balkans, but demolished in the 1980s together with Cotroceni, St. Pantelimon and other churches in Bucharest. Also from this period date the monasteries of Suzana, Zamfira, Cheia, Varatec, Toplita, Moisei and Sihastria, where the great spiritual teachers Paisie and Cleopa were to dwell. The foundations of Muntenia continued the Brîncoveanu style, while those of Moldavia preserved the local style, while also assimilating baroque influences.

The most significant event of this period was the Paisian movement named after St. Paisie Velichkovski of Neamtz (†1794). The philokalic movement had been initiated by Abbot Vasile of Poiana Marului (Buzau). It should be stressed that by the Secularisation law of 1863, monasticism was dealt a heavy blow. The only monastery to escape secularisation was the above-mentioned Frasinei, thanks to the saintliness of its founder, St Calinic, as emerges from a document signed by Alexander John Cuza himself.

A century earlier, Transylvanian monasticism had also suffered at the hands of the Roman-Catholic Hapsburgs whose cannons demolished many hermitages and monasteries. It was not until our own times that we have joyfully been able to see the renascence of long-suffering Transylvanian monasticism. The monasteries of Cioara of Sophronius, defender of Orthodoxy, Rohia, Moisei, Bixad, Nicula, Lupsa and others continue the monastic life to this day.

In Dobrudja too the monastic life has continued to flourish in monasteries such as Cocos, Cilic-Dere, and St Mary Techirghiol.

Having been sorely afflicted by the laws of Cuza, monastic life recovers in the early Twentieth Century, only to be sorely afflicted once more during the time of the totalitarian regime, through a decree of 1959, which drastically reduced the number of hermitages and monasteries and also the monks and nuns who dwelled therein. After 1989, monasticism, as well as the life of the church as a whole, saw an unprecedented revival. Nonetheless, we should not forget that in the meantime, around the Antim Monastery in Bucharest, monks and people of culture had gathered as nowhere else in the Europe of those times, above all in the zone ruled by the Soviets. It was here, under the guidance of a Russian monk from Optina, that the Prayer of Jesus was revived, just as at

Sambata Fagarasului the spirit of the philokalia was revived through the joint efforts of a monk and a theologian: Father Arsenie Boca and Father Dumitru Staniloae. All this after the monasteries had seemingly disappeared, having been reduced to mere "historic monuments"!

In Romania today there are more than six hundred hermitages and monasteries, and more than eight thousand monks and nuns, who by the oath they give during the service of tonsure swear willingly to live in poverty, cleanliness and obedience.

The monks are headed by hêgumens or abbots, aided by a spiritual council, a council of judgement and an economic council. The community includes novices, riassofori, monks, monk deacons, hieromonks (priest monks), *sinkelloi*, *protosinkelloi*, and archimandrites, the latter being ordained to serve at the altar, and all of them having a confessor who tests them and guides them in spiritual matters.

Many of the inhabitants of the monasteries have studied not only in Romania but also at prestigious universities in Greece, Western Europe and the United States, contributing in an irenic and ecumenical spirit to closeness between monks and monasteries and thereby between Churches. Romanian monasteries have even been founded in Western Europe and the USA, and are living presences of the traditional Orthodox spirit.

It is moving to meet today hundreds of young monks and nuns with higher theological and lay education serving at the altar, striving in the good ordinance of the monasteries, cultivating church music, painting icons, embroidering, weaving, ministering to the needs of the numerous pilgrims and visitors, piously fulfilling their purpose in the life of the Church and of the people. They are vigilant, keeping awake monastic orderliness in the spirit of the Gospels, following Christ the pauper, pure and obedient. They reveal to pilgrims the mystery of penitence, godly love and the way of life of the monks who retire to cells, they pray in chapels, study in libraries, provide lodging for worshippers in the xenodochium, and show them what has piously been handed down from those of former times.

Many of those who have dwelled and striven in the monasteries mentioned above have entered the ranks of the saints, ever the goal of every monk and Christian.

Hieromonk Iustin Marchis,
Stavropoleos

Monasteries and Churches in Moldavia and Bukowina

Even though it might seem to do so, the history of Moldavian architecture does not begin with Stephen the Great. Its origins are much more distant, and are to be found in the period during which the state was being formed and the life of the church organised. It was then that the first wooden churches were built, modest, simple structures, of which the church built by Dragos Voda at Volovat still survives. Stephen Great moved the church to Putna, where it can still be found today. In this period, there was still oscillation between various influences from the Byzantine world and the East, the Russian world, and Romanic and Gothic art. A direct testimony to Romanic influence is the Church of Radauti, ascribed to the reign of Bogdan Voda, which, along with the Church of the Holy Trinity in Siret, is one of the oldest surviving stone monuments. However, it was not to establish a tradition in Moldavian architecture, as it was the Byzantine-inspired triconch plan of the church in Siret that would be adopted and perfected in the epochs to come, constituting the formal and symbolic matrix of the entire ecclesiastical architecture of Moldavia.

The churches and monastic foundations grouped in this section cover a period that commences in the late fourteenth century, continues with the foundations of the epoch of Stephen the Great and Petru Rares, and goes as far as the late seventeenth century, with the magnificent churches of Anastasius Krimka and Vasile Lupu. Thus, the period sets out from the first cultural synthesis, the classic period of mediaeval Moldavian art, passes through the assimilations of the sixteenth century, with the spectacular epoch of exterior mural painting during the reign of Peter Rares, and continues with the affirmation of a new synthesis, that between the traditional cultural elements of Byzantine provenance and the innovative elements of the seventeenth-century western Baroque.

After the church of Putna Monastery, a powerful and imposing monastic complex whose original aspect we are, however, no longer able to see due to ulterior alterations and reconstruction, the craftsmen of Stephen the Great were gradually to give shape to the type of architecture that would reach its perfection in the church of Neamtz Monastery. As early as at Patrauti, although the smallest of the prince's foundations, a number of specific elements are heralded, including Gothic-influenced door and window frames and the system of vaulting with four large arches upon which rest another four slanting arches, while the support necessary to sustain the spire is provided by means of the pendentives. This is what will come to be known as the Moldavian vault, an original creation of Moldavian master craftsmen, whereby a vertical development of the edifice is achieved and a certain expressivity in the exterior is obtained at the level of the spire. The church of the Neamtz Monastery gathers together the entire architectonic experience of the period and will for more than a century constitute the prototype of the principal Moldavian foundations. The exterior already outlines the specific features, with the expressivity of brick cladding decorated with blind arches and ceramic disks. It is also now that two new spaces will be created, amplifying the horizontal unfolding of the church: the tomb chamber or *gropnita* and the porch situated on the western side.

The most important innovations brought about by the sixteenth century relate to the opening of the porch, the use of Renaissance door and window settings, and above all the painted decoration of the exterior. In the epoch of Peter Rares, the Moldavian church was already evolving towards an ideal of magnificence and richness, which would come to fruition in the following century. The proportions grow, the narthex becomes more spacious, and a new space appears above the tomb chamber, the *tainita* ("hidden place"), to house the precious possessions of the monastery, reached by a hidden door in the nave and a stair within the north façade.

In the first years of the reign of Peter Rares, some of the churches built by Stephen (Harlau, Dobrovat) were adorned with murals, and a new campaign of construction followed. Probota (1530) and Moldovita (1537) were built, where, together with the adoption of previous planimetric and spatial types, new elements of profile were introduced, appertaining to a Gothic repertoire that had already been assimilated within the native tradition alongside elements of Renaissance influence.

But the field in which the epoch of Peter Rares will innovate most is that of mural painting. It is now that many innovative features take on life. The master *zugravi* (from the Greek *zôgraphos* – one who paints from life), of course encouraged by the elevated, literary medium in which the iconographic programmes were conceived, possessed a double merit: it was through them that in Moldavia, as though in an island, the living tradition of monumental painting was preserved, almost two centuries after the centre of artistic life that was Byzantium perished, and, on the other hand, they always displayed the tendency to enrich, using new subjects inspired from hymns and old historical literature, the Byzantine tradition of painting, in order to make it understood and accessible to an ever greater number of believers.

Among the monuments that appear in our selection, Probota represents an original moment in interior mural painting, while Humor already introduces a clearly established iconographic programme that will be repeated with added magnificence at Moldovita. Through *zugrav* Dragos Coman, Arbore testifies to the artistic maturity of the Moldavian school of painting under Peter Rares. For the elegance of their lines and the varied dynamic of the composition, the murals of the Bistritza Chapel may also be placed in relation to Arbore. Thanks to the efforts of Metropolitan Grigorie Rosca, Voronet too received a rich pictorial garb. In its breadth and compositional richness, the Last Judgement conceived and executed here constitutes a unique moment in eastern European art. Sucevita is an ensemble that already reveals a knowledge of equilibrium and a sense of relations, especially in its magnificent votive sequence, a veritable court painting.
What is new in the sixteenth century is a remarkable capacity to renew decorative morphology against the background of a Baroque tendency otherwise common to the whole of European art at the time. In the case of Moldavian architecture, it will not, however, come into competition with the built forms of the edifices, whose composition remains in all circumstances balanced and calm, in accordance with the native architectural tradition.

The church of Dragomirna Monastery, founded by Anastasius Krimka in 1609, was to mark in one form or another most of the important foundations of the seventeenth century. Its design continues the Moldavian tradition, but the decoration is new, and the spire in particular inaugurates a new epoch in the architecture of Moldavia, being clad in floral motifs arranged in small rectangular panels that are reminiscent of both the style of the Renaissance and that of the Caucasus. The decorative magnificence of the Church of the Three Hierarchs proceeds from the spire of Dragomirna, but in addition here it is possible to discern Armenian, Georgian and Islamic influences in the rich decorative repertory.

What the architecture of Moldavia celebrates is a civilisation of the image, whether we look at the intersections of light and shade created by Moldavian vaults, at the alternation of windows and niches on the facades, at the chromatic accents of the ceramic disks, or at the colours that garb the walls of the churches. And what follows it down the centuries is the expression of a mode of being and of living like unto the gesture captured in the votive painting whereby the prince dedicates to Christ the church he has built, his very prayer materialised in stone.

MOLDAVIA AND BUKOWINA

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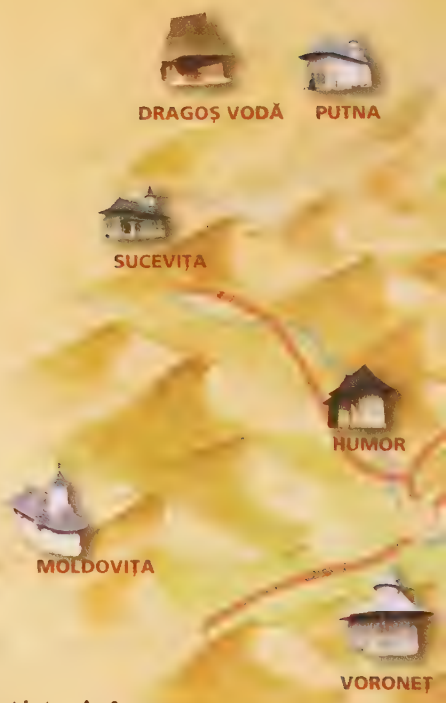


RBORE
BOGDAN VODĂ
RĂDĂUȚI
DRAGOMIRNA
PĂTRĂUȚI
SUCEAVA
PROBOTA
NEAMȚ
SECU
TG. NEAMȚ
AGAPIA
PIATRA NEAMȚ
BISTRIȚA
TG. FRUMOS
TREI IERARHI
IAȘI
DOBROVĂȚ

The Church of Dragos-Voda

First documentary mention: 1352-1353(?)
Titles: Sfanta Adormire

South-east view of the church.

In 1710, chronicler Nicolae Costin, the son of Miron Costin, writes of a very old tradition according to which, when Dragos Voda left Maramures, he built a small wooden church at Volovat, an old princely domain, which was later to house his tomb. Even if we have no documents to confirm the legend handed down by Nicolae Costin, nor can we reject it for the same reason.

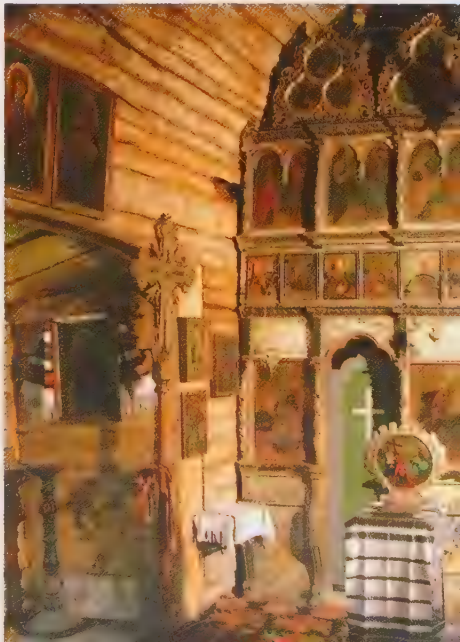
In 1502, Stephen the Great moved the church to his foundation at Putna, and built a stone church on the site.

However, it is not possible to assert that the church which can today be seen at Putna is that from the fourteenth century; the church built by Dragos in 1352-3 was repeatedly repaired, and elements were gradually replaced, as is usually the case with the restoration of wooden architecture.

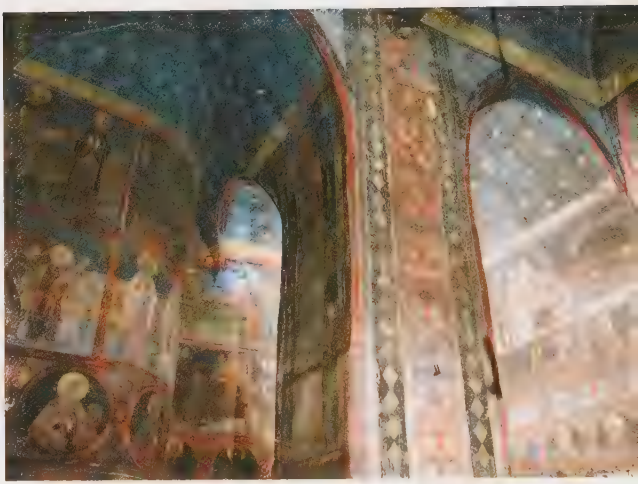
However, those who have researched the monument sustain that no major structural alterations have occurred, and that its general aspect has remained unchanged. A part of the most recent repairs and alterations is otherwise known. Initially, it was, like peasant houses, a simple construction, without a tower, with a steep roof and broad eaves. It has the consecrated plan, with the three spaces specific to Orthodox worship: entrance, nave, and altar.

In 1778, a pinewood porch was added and by 1871 it had been enlarged a number of times.

It is supposed to be the oldest church in Moldavia, built at the very beginnings of the principality, a fact that confers upon it its value and importance among the numerous and famed foundations of the province.



Interior of the church, view towards the iconostas.



The Church of St Nicholas, Radauti

First documentary mention: 1359-1365, Radauti, Succava county.

The church porch: details of the murals.

The Church of *St Nicholas* in Radauti, or *the Bogdan Voda Church*, as it is also called, after its founder, is the oldest stone religious structure in Moldavia to have been preserved in its original form. It was built by Bogdan Voda in 1359 and was to be the necropolis of the first princes of Moldavia.

In 1559, it was restored by the master craftsmen of Alexander Lapusneanu, who added a closed porch, adjoined to the original structure, and altered the window frames in the Gothic style. The present bell tower, on the north-east side of the church, was built in place of an older one in 1781.

The church is of the basilica type, with three naves and a semicircular altar apse connected to the nave by small rectangular spaces, reminiscent of the choir of Catholic churches, and constitutes a synthesis of the forms of Byzantine architecture with those of western Romanic and Gothic. The median nave is vaulted with a half-cylinder strengthened with double arches around the columns, while the lateral naves, narrower and lower, are roofed by half-cylinders with hidden galleries above, like the tribunes of the fortified churches of Transylvania, to which the church in Radauti is otherwise related. The rectangular porch is roofed with a semi-spherical calotte resting on a double system of crossed arches, and has two entrances, on the south and north sides, with massive wooden doors in Gothic settings.

Made of raw hewn stone, with a whitewashed façade, and with buttresses employed in the architectural composition decoratively more than functionally, the Church of Bogdan Voda is remarkable not only for the clarity and unity of its volumes but also the accuracy and harmony of its proportions.

A first pictorial layer is supposed to date from the early fifteenth century and a second from the period in which the craftsmen of Alexander Lapusneanu carried out alterations. Between 1745 and 1750, during the episcopacy of Iacob Pruteanu, another mural layer was added. However, these frescoes are covered by tempera paintings made by Bukowina painter Epaminonda Bucevski in 1880. In the altar, careful preservation work has restored the initial freshness of the painting. Compositions such as the Last Supper, the Scattering of the Apostles, and the Washing of the Feet, present certain stylistic peculiarities that are reminiscent of the murals of Voronet. In the votive painting in the nave, Stephen the Great is depicted alongside Bogdan Voda and Alexander Lapusneanu, a possible argument for the fact that the initial painting was made during his reign.

The Bogdan Voda Monastery was also an important literary centre. It was here that important hierarchs of Moldavia lived and worked, while the founder and princes who followed them endowed it over the course of time with numerous jewels, items of religious worship, books and manuscripts, most of which are now in the collections of Putna Monastery (where there is a Menologion for the month of November dating from the time of Stephen the Great) and Sucevita (which houses among others an epitaph from the time of Alexander the Good and a chalice cloth donated by Stephen in 1493).

The church viewed from the south-west, and the bell tower

Neamtz Monastery

The monastery church, sweeping view from the south-west

The church of Neamtz Monastery was built by Stephen the Great in 1495, and is the most expressive of his foundations, not only in its plan and structure but also in its exterior plasticity. The buildings in the precinct, as they appear today, are later structures, dating from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.

The architecture and decoration, with stone, pebble and brick facing, a band of niches, polychrome ceramics, elongated blind arches and symmetrically arranged buttresses give the monument its grandeur.

The plan is that consecrated in Moldavian architecture, with a porch, narthex, *gropnita*, nave and altar. There are two facing entrances to the porch, and the entrance to the narthex is via a monumental portal with toruses culminating in a broken arch. The narthex and tomb room are separated by a wall with an opening framed by intertwining rods. The altar ends in a semicircular apse, flanked by the two small spaces with a role in worship: the proscomidion and the diaconicon.

The spire rises above two superposed bases, the first octagonal and the second stellate, both decorated with niches and enamelled disks.

The present murals do not preserve much of the original paintings. In 1830, there was a general renovation and then, after the fire of 1862 and the unsuccessful interventions made to clean the murals, only a few scenes were saved, including the Mother of God and the Holy Child in the lunette of the portal between the narthex and the porch. In the tomb chamber, the repainting carried out in the nineteenth century entirely preserves the distribution of the original sixteenth-

The inner courtyard, monastic cells

Gothic window settings

century scenes. Even if it loses in value, having been retouched colour upon colour, from the iconographic point of view the murals here have their documentary interest.

However, Neamtz Monastery remains in history as an important cultural and artistic centre. From its very beginnings, there was a school of calligraphers and miniaturists here, founded by the celebrated Gavriil Urik, who decorated, together with his disciples, numerous books of religious worship and theological texts for monasteries and churches. It was in the literary atmosphere of Neamtz that the historians who wrote the Chronicles of Moldavia during the time of Alexander Lapusneanu and Peter Rares worked. It was here that monastic and theological schools continued to function. In the late eighteenth century, Abbot Paisie Velichkovsky, renowned for the spirit of renewal that he brought to Romanian monastic life, provided a strong impetus not only to spiritual life but also cultural activity, which he otherwise saw as intertwined, in the spirit of the Philokalia.

In the early nineteenth century, Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi founded a press that printed countless works, including the Gospels of 1821.

To this day, between the walls of the monastery are preserved artworks of great value, which testify to the illustrious cultural role that has been played by this monastic establishment. The library houses over eighteen thousand volumes, including priceless manuscripts from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries. The museum houses icons, silverware and embroidery, donated over the centuries or fashioned by the monks here.

Bistrita Monastery

[illegible] mentary mention: 1402.
[illegible]

Bistrita is one of the oldest monastic abodes in Moldavia, founded by four Musatin voevodes, and with an architecture that is as complex as its history.

In 1402, Alexander the Good erects on the site of a modest wooden church an imposing stone edifice, conceived as a princely necropolis, although not in the form in which it will come down to the present day. In 1498, Stephen the Great built a one-storey belfry with a small chapel dedicated to St John the New of Suceava, the Protector of Moldavia. Its form has remained almost unchanged, with corners strengthened by buttresses that rise to more than half the height of the structure. Between 1541 and 1546, Peter Rares rebuilt the surrounding walls and the entrance tower, erected a new princely house next to the ruins of that of the first founder, and "restored the holy monastery from its foundations", as a document of 1546 says.

The last great founder at Bistrita would be Alexander Lapusneanu. We do not know exactly what he did, as the votive stone says merely that he "built this church", which could mean that he rebuilt it from its foundations or that he strengthened and restored whatever had been damaged or had decayed over time.

As we see it today, after all the transformations through which it has passed, the church of Bistrita Monastery is a monumental structure with sober exterior decoration. It has the structure, proportions and elements characteristic of sixteenth-century Moldavian religious architecture.

From the high plinth, the walls of the church, from undressed stone covered in plaster, rise smoothly to the upper part, where, beneath the cornice, there are two rows of superposed niches of varying size. A system of nine massive buttresses, eight arranged in pairs and one at the apse of the altar, give rhythm to the façade, likewise the nineteen long, elegant niches, similar in their arrangement to those at Probota. The masonry is pierced by a system of windows with Gothic profiles. The spire above the nave rests on two stellate bases and is in its turn decorated with a system of niches, blind arches and window settings.

The church is a triconch in plan, with a spire above the nave, being more developed along the longitudinal axis due to the five succeeding large spaces: closed porch, narthex, *gropnita*, nave, and altar.
The entrance to the porch – a vaulted room with two spherical calottes – is on the south side. Here, to either side of the door to the narthex, fragments of the original late-sixteenth-century murals have been preserved: the Deisis and the Theotokos, accompanied by a short inscription that reveals they were painted by a certain Matia in 1590.

In general, the paintings were affected by the restoration work of 1814, when they were repainted and superimpositions were made over the original layer. They were subject to further interventions in the 1980s.

The entrance to the narthex is through a portal with receding mouldings capped by a broken arch. It is a large space, almost double that of the porch, but with a similar system of vaulting. The passage to the tomb chamber is through a portal decorated with rods that split in the upper corners into two branches, a form of ornamentation often met in interior Moldavian doors from the epoch of Stephen the Great.

The church seen from the south-west, with the belfry in the background

The south wall of the church, the inscription in Slavonic, and the arms of Moldavia

The belfry and a part of the suspended bridge that connected the old princely house

The nave in its turn is an ample space, developed on the vertical plane, with a slender and elegant spire resting on the well-known system of Moldavian vaulting, a combination of semi-cylindrical arches and pendentives with a simultaneously structural and aesthetic role.

In the belfry built by Stephen the Great, beneath the plaster that covered the walls of the chapel, the original murals were discovered in 1924. They were painted during the reign of Peter Rares in 1541. They include depictions of the martyrdom of St John the New of Suceava, scenes showing the bringing of his relics to Suceava, and figures of saints, all showing great expressivity and chromatic richness.

Bistrita Monastery in its early period was also an important cultural centre of Moldavia. It was here in the early fifteenth century that what would later be known as the *Bistrita Pomelnik* was created, one of the land's first annals, containing the names of the princes and their families, of the leading dignitaries and boyars, as they succeeded each other down to the seventeenth century. It was also here that the celebrated icon of *St Anna with the Virgin Mary* could be found, an icon donated to the Princess Anna, wife of Alexander the Good, by the wife of one of the last Byzantine emperors of the Palaeologus family, Manuil II, in the early fifteenth century, a testament to the connexions between Moldavia and the Byzantine Empire.

The fortified walls of the monastery precincts

Humor Monastery

First documentary mention: 1530.
Gura Humorului, Suceava county.

The monastery church, view from the south-east

Built by Theodore the Logothete in 1530, the church of Humor Monastery stands on the site of an older structure dating from the time of Alexander the Good, who in the fifteenth century donated a stone church to the monks dwelling around a wooden hermitage. However, the stone church collapsed in the early sixteenth century.

What sets the church of Humor Monastery apart, besides its exterior murals with their predominantly red chromatic, is the open porch with four wide broken arches, a new feature in Moldavian architecture during the time of Stephen the Great, as well as the absence of a spire above the nave.

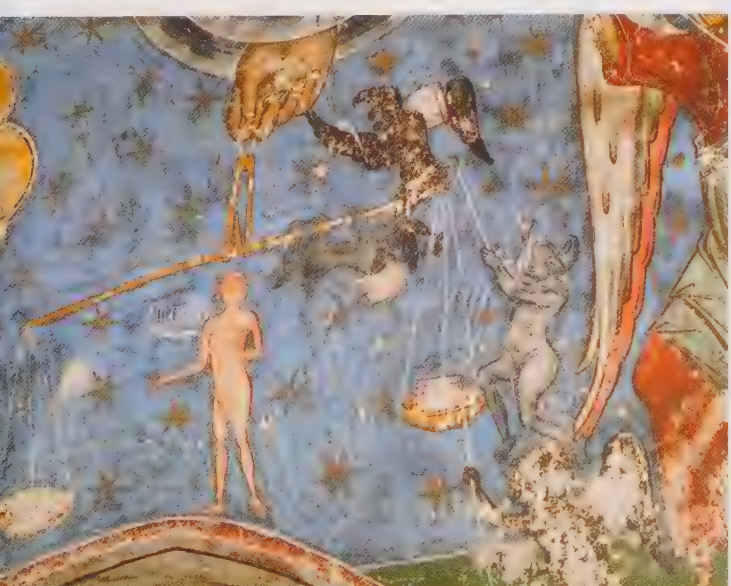
The passage from one space to another is through entrances framed by twining rods, decorative elements that reveal, along with the blind arches beneath the exterior niches and the window settings, the stamp of an architecture with both Gothic and Renaissance influences at Humor.

On the exterior, the south wall, lateral apses, and the west wall integrally preserve their murals, while on the north side, more exposed to the elements, only fragments of *the Tree of Jesse* and *the Akathistos Hymn of St George* can now be discerned.

On the west side, there unfolds *the Last Judgement*, a monumental scene with numerous personages orchestrated with great compositional knowledge and mastery of detail.

On the south façade, around the narthex, there are depicted twenty-four scenes of *the Akathistos Hymn*, together with *the Siege of Constantinople*. Also here, around the tomb chamber, can be viewed scenes from *the life of St Nicholas* the Hierarch and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Detail of *the Last Judgement*, west wall of the porch



On the walls of the apses are depicted angels, prophets, apostles, hierarchs, martyrs and the devout, who together form the most sweeping composition at Humor, that of *the Prayer to All Saints*.

In the interior, the pictorial representation continues the iconographic tradition of murals from the time of Stephen the Great, with an emphasis on narrative, numerous figures, scenes and registers.

The votive portraits bring an especially picturesque and documentary note to the depiction of the faces of the founders and their vestments: Prince Peter Rares and his family, Theodore the Logothete and his wife Anastasia, and Daniil the Hetman are just some of the highly expressive portraits on the west wall.

The precincts were fortified during the time of Prince Vasile Lupu, who surrounded the foundation of Theodore the Logothete with durable walls and a strong buttressed tower. The corpus of cells, the abbacy, the trapezium and church annexes are outside the precincts, to the north, being later structures.

Detail of *the Akathistos Hymn*, south wall of the church

South façade of the church, upper register, scenes from *the Akathistos Hymn, the Prayer to All Saints, the Theotokos in Glory*, in the lower register scenes from *the Siege of Constantinople*

Putna Monastery

First documentary mention: 1466-1469, Putna, Suceava county

The west façade of the church: windows with Gothic frames

Rebuilt many times down the centuries, Putna has wholly altered its original form, which dated from 1470, the year in which this foundation of Stephen the Great was consecrated. Its former appearance, with surrounding walls and massive corner towers and a gate tower, can be reconstituted only documentarily, as rebuilding in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to demolition of the fortifications. Only the old treasury tower, still standing on the western side, now evokes the age and wealth of the princely foundation.

The church built by Stephen the Great, certainly monumental and imposing, was altered during the reign of Gheorghe Stefan, in 1654, during the time of Metropolitan Iacov Putneanu, in 1757, and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The interior space, with its traditional compartments, still preserves the original plan. The entrance to the church is through two doors on either side of the porch. The door to the narthex has an imposing Gothic frame. Each of the rooms of the church has different vaulting: a semi-cylindrical vault in the altar, a vault with slanting arches in the nave, two small cupolas on pendentives and double arches in the *gropnita*, cupolas on slanting arches in the narthex, and two crossed vaults in the porch.

In the seventeenth century, another six buttresses were added to the initial six in the seventeenth century. At the same time, the porch was added and alterations made to the exterior decoration.

The facades of the church, with niches and blind arches, with a band of cable moulding and small consoles beneath the cornice, entirely whitewashed, are the result of rebuilding during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The church was painted soon after it was completed, but fires and earthquakes had completely destroyed the murals by the fifteenth century.

Conceived from the start as a princely necropolis, Putna Monastery houses the tombs of the family of Stephen the Great and his descendents down to Peter Rares.

The monastery complex, panoramic view from the north-east

The monastery church seen from the south-east, with the Treasury Tower, built on the west part of the surrounding wall

With the help of its founder, in a short time Putna Monastery became one of the most important centres of ecclesiastical culture. Together with the first abbot of Putna, Ioasaf, many monks came from Neamtz Monastery, some of them calligraphers and miniaturists who had been apprentices in the school of Gavriil Urik. Many of the books they made have been preserved. The Gospels illuminated by Deacon Nicodim are celebrated, and contain a votive page in which Stephen the Great is depicted, one of the first lay portraits in Moldavia

As in other parts, at Putna chronicles of Moldavia were composed and copied, testimony to the literary atmosphere of the monasteries of the age

In the sixteenth century, there was a school for the clergy here. At that time, Byzantine chant flourished. At Putna there were choristers, composers and copyists who made up a musical school whose activity continued uninterrupted for more than a century, and which left dozens of musical manuscripts in the Byzantine tradition.

Manuscripts from Putna, some with gilded bindings, can now be found alongside items of embroidery, icons and precious jewels in the monastery museum

The church belfry, window with carved stone setting

The monastery church, south facade with the entrance portal

The Church of the Holy Cross, Patrauti

First documentary mention: 1487
Patrauti, Suceava county

Along with the church at Milisauti, the Church of *the Holy Cross* at Patrauti was the first of the many foundations of Stephen the Great. Built in 1487, in the form in which we can still see it today, originally with naked stone but now whitewashed, the church is a triconch in plan, with a spire above the nave and a fragmented roof. Lacking buttresses, it is the simplest of the tri-lobate churches built by Stephen. The three apses, polygonal on the exterior and circular in the interior, have niches, above which there is a row of blind windows, and beneath the eaves can be seen green-enamelled ceramic plaques. The dynamism of the facades of fifteenth-century Moldavian churches was achieved in this way, while the tendency towards the polychromatic would stimulate the pictorial solutions adopted later in the exterior murals of the sixteenth century.

The system of vaulting at Patrauti heralds in its turn the original system of vaulting created by the master craftsmen of Stephen the Great. The narthex is vaulted with a spherical calotte resting on four arches in console and pendentives.

The portal of the entrance, situated on the west wall of the narthex, has a frame in broken arch with profiled archivolt. The rectangular windows and the inner door of the nave are equipped with intertwining rods, all elements of Gothic provenance, a style which blends with the architecture of the epoch of Stephen the Great.

The murals were painted immediately after the building of the church. Here at Patrauti, the iconographic programme specific to Moldavian churches was created for the first time. Such is the case of *the Cavalcade of the Emperor Constantine the Great*, which can be seen on the west wall, above the entrance The composition depicts the procession of the Emperor, accompanied by sixteen saints on horseback, the last of whom, the Archangel Michael, points to the cross that appears in the heavens.

In the interior, in the nave, fragments of the original mural have been preserved: *Jesus Pantokrator* in the spire, and angels, apostles and saints on the walls. From the Passion Cycle, the majority of the scenes can be seen on the walls of the nave: *the Arrest of Christ*, *the Judgement of Pilate*, *the Mocking of Christ*, *the Road to Golgotha*, *Christ on the Cross*, *the Descent from the Cross*, *the Lamentation*, *the Entombment*, *the Canting Women at the Tomb*, and *Doubting Thomas*. In the paintings of the altar can be discerned the scenes of *the Last Supper*, *the Scattering of the Apostles*, and *the Washing of the Feet*, as well as the entire register of the Hierarchs.

The Church of Patrauti, although the simplest of the foundations of Stephen the Great, is a representative monument of this early period of Moldavian architecture.

The monastery church, view
from the south-west,
and the belfry

The west façade of the church: detail of the *Last Judgement*, detail from the lunette of the portal, with the icon of *the Holy Cross*

The monastery church seen from the west

The Cavalcade of the Holy Cross, detail of interior mural

Voronet Monastery

First documentary mention: 1488,
Gura Humorului, Suceava county.

The monastery church, overall view from the south-east

Voronet was built by Stephen the Great in 1488, as is inscribed in the votive stone above the entrance, on the site of the wooden hermitage of the famous Daniil the Hermit. Architecturally, it belongs to the simpler of Stephen's foundations, with a triconch plan, a spire above the nave and fragmented roof. In 1547, Metropolitan Grigorie Rosca added the closed exonarthex (porch), perforated by two large windows above the entrances. The apses preserve the original decoration of elongated niches and blind windows beneath the cornice. The spire, resting on two superposed bases, one square and one stellate, is also decorated with blind windows.

At Voronet, Gothic elements come to complete the Moldavian synthesis: buttresses, window settings, the entrance to the nave framed by a veritable bunch of mouldings terminating in a broken arch (originally the entrance to the church), and the vaulting of the narthex, with arches resting on consoles, complement elements of Byzantine tradition. It is to the latter tradition that the plan belongs – with all the spaces demanded by Orthodox worship – as well as the system of vaulting on pendentives or semicircular ceilings and, not least, the interior and exterior murals.

Inside the church, in the altar, nave and narthex, the murals date from the time of the founder, with subjects arranged according to the canons. In the nave, setting out from Christ Pantokrator in the cupola of the spire, we follow the three registers of angels, prophets and apostles that adorn the walls of the spire, then the four Evangelists, in the pendentives, and on the walls the miracles from the life of the Saviour, then the moments in His Passion, and finally the figures of soldier saints and scenes from the life of the Theotokos.

The south façade of the church, detail of *the Tree of Jesse*

The murals of the narthex and the entire coloured garb of the exterior were painted during the time of Metropolitan Grigorie Rosca. At his behest, in 1547, the walls of the porch were adorned with saints from the church calendar, in the so-called Synaxarion.

The splendour and fame of Voronet is due to the exterior murals. Here, the Moldavian masters had the knowledge and skill to adapt and interpret original models from the Byzantine world and add original themes, with elements from everyday life and from nature, and then give them their unique colouring, using lapis lazuli pigment, whence the celebrated "Voronet blue".

What immediately strikes the gaze is the monumental *Last Judgement* on the west façade, with *the Deisis* in its central axis, whence flows the river of flame, in which burn the sinners. On either side of *the Throne of Hetimasia* unfurls the host of the faithful, guided by St Paul the Apostle, to the north, and the unbelievers, chastised by Moses, to the south. The figures are individualised, the costumes faithfully rendered. The hell scenes, with devils carrying scrolls inscribed with sins, show much humour and folk inventiveness, while the scenes of the resurrection of the dead from the earth denote a nuanced sense of observation. The dozens of figures that can be seen in the scene of paradise reflect spiritual richness but also drama.

To pass to the other iconographic subjects: on the exterior walls of the apses is depicted the *Heavenly Host*, which is to say rows of persons included in *the Prayer of All Saints*. On the north wall, there are scenes from *Genesis* and *the Akathistos Hymn of the Theotokos*. On the south wall unfurls *the Tree of Jesse*, that is, the spiritual genealogy of the Saviour, and *the Akathistos Hymn of St Nicholas* in three registers. A beloved saint in Moldavia, the life of St John the New is told in scenes with numerous details and figures on either side of the window.

As well as being a monument of art, Voronet is also the place where, until the end of the eighteenth century, monks wrote and illuminated religious books. It is also here, in *the Voronet Codices* and *the Voronet Psalter*, copied in the sixteenth century, that the peculiarity of rhotacism, i.e. the transformation of 'r' into 'n', appears.

The parable of the sower, north façade of the church

The Last Judgement,
west façade of the church

Detail of *the Last Judgement*,
west façade of the church

Hell scene: devils with scrolls on which
the sins of men are inscribed

The upper register of the *Deisis*, whence flows the river of flame in which burn the sinners

The lower register of *the Throne of Hetimasia*, with the host of the faithful led by St Paul the Apostle on the left, and the unbelievers, chastised by Moses, on the right

The resurrection of the buried dead at the Last Judgement

The Church of the Beheading of St John the Baptist, Arbor

The church was founded in 1502 by Luca Arbore, one of the great high officials of Stephen the Great, as recorded in the votive stone above the entrance.

Built of undressed stone, rectangular in plan, with a semicircular apse to the east, and without spires, the church resembles a prism. The entrance, with a frame in broken arch and mouldings resting directly on the plinth, is on the south side, and the usual lateral apses of Moldavian churches are here reduced to two niches scooped from the thickness of the walls, so that together with the altar apse they confer upon the interior plan a pseudo-tri-conch form, which will also be adopted by the churches at Dobrovat and Reuseni. These two elements are what characterise the architecture of the church of Luca Arbore the Logothete.

A system of tiered arches, four lengthwise and four crosswise, gradually reduce the space of the narthex, forming in the upper part a square roofed by a calotte. In the nave, the system of vaulting is the Moldavian one, with slanting arches, reminiscent of the forms specific to wooden architecture.

In the interior, the murals preserve a number of original fragments, revealing the painter's concern with nuance of expression and the dynamic forms of the figures depicted. Such is the case of the scenes depicting the ecumenical synods in the narthex and *the Cavalcade of the Emperor Constantine*, a composition of a political nature.

The exterior of the church was painted in 1541, at the same time as the partial repainting of the interior murals, the author being Dragos Coman. The murals are well preserved on the south façade and entirely on the west side. On the south wall, to the left of the entrance, there is a sweeping depiction, with an especial sense for the decorative, of *the Akathistos Hymn*, beneath which can be seen *the Siege of Constantinople*, showing the attack upon the Christian city, with the following Slavonic inscription: "The Emperor Chosores proceeded with the Persians and with the Scythians and with the Libyans and with other idol-worshippers against Constantinople (...) Prayers stirred against them the wrath of the Panagia and God sent against them lightning and a rain of fire and drowned them in the sea". To the right of the entrance, there is a depiction of *the Last Judgement* and, surrounding the apse of the altar, there can be seen the fourth major theme of Moldavian exterior murals, *the Prayer to All Saints*, here amplified with yet another register, entirely composed of soldier saints. The tall figures gracefully line the curved surface of the wall, giving the procession a note of great elegance and, thanks to the lack of niches, a continuity and unity that is not to be found in other exterior murals

The scenes that make up *the Prayer to All Saints*, unfolding in small sequences, painted in successive registers, valorise in a natural way the concave space of the east wall, and the compositional harmony, the precision of line, and the freshness of the colouring give consummate artistic unity to the subject.

The Church of *the Beheading of St John the Baptist*, south fa ade and entrance portal

Dobrovat Monastery

Built by Stephen the Great next to an old hermitage in 1503, Dobrovat Monastery is the prince's last foundation. Entry to the precincts is though the arch of a bell tower, built later, in the eighteenth century, when other additions were also made to the complex. From the exterior, the church is striking for its sobriety and monumentality: a stone plinth, buttresses that give vertical rhythm to the simple stone façade, and, in the upper part, two friezes of niches and blind windows.

The space is divided into narthex, tomb chamber, nave, with two lateral apses, and altar. Entry to the narthex and passage to the nave is through stone portals with intertwining rods, Renaissance in influence, while on the exterior the window settings with broken arches are of Gothic influence. The system of vaulting in the narthex and nave proposes one of the most original of solutions, with two pairs of transversal arches, which is to be found only in two other Moldavian churches, at Arbore and Reuseni.

The murals were painted later, at the behest of Peter Rares. Even those who are unschooled in the interpretation of mediaeval iconography will remark the dense accumulation of images, the firmness of the figures and their harmonious chromatic accord. The most interesting element is the votive painting: at Dobrovat, the family of the founder is not depicted, as would normally be the case, but rather three rulers: Stephen the Great, Bogdan III, and Peter Rares, dedicating the church to Christ the Saviour.

In the nave, emphasis is placed on *the Passion*, with scenes arranged in continous friezes, beginning with *the Prayer on the Mount of Olives* and ending with *the Crucifixion* and *the Descent from the Cross*. In the lower registers are depicted soldier saints. In the altar can be remarked *the Last Supper*, with a complicated architectural frame, and a compositionally well-organised group of the Apostles, with one peculiarity: the disciple who rests his head on the breast of Jesus is not John but Peter.

The narthex is dedicated to the Theotokos. There are numerous images whose theme is her glorification: in turn, the Theotokos is surrounded by angels and seraphim, prophets, bishops, and the faithful. Also in the narthex, there are

Detail of the votive painting
the voevodes Stephen the Great, Bogdan III,
and Peter Rares

depictions of the seven ecumenical synods, and above the entrance, on the east wall, there is the patron icon of the church: *the Descent of the Holy Ghost*.

Viewed overall, the murals of Dobrovat are full of innovative iconographic and stylistic details, with recourse to Moldavian calligraphic art of the time.

The monastery church, view from the south-west

The monastery church,
general view from the south-east

Probota Monastery

The present church of Probota Monastery was founded by Peter Rares in 1530, on the site of an older wooden structure.

The exterior is distinctive for the elegance of its proportions and the harmony of its volumes: to the east, the lateral apses are flanked by two buttresses of graven stone, in steps, and to the west at the corners of the porch there are another two buttresses, while the main apse is in its turn supported by the foot of a buttress. At the level of the apses, over the entire surface area of the walls there are tall niches with semicircular tops and a band of blind windows that girdles the church beneath the cornice.

The plan of the church is a tri-conch classic for the period, with apses polygonal on the exterior and semicircular on the interior, with the traditional arrangement of rooms: porch, narthex, tomb chamber, nave and altar.

The closed porch is surprising for the Gothic aspect of the eight tall windows, which give it an especial luminosity, for the high vault and the two access portals terminating in a broken arch.

The narthex too offers the surprise of an ample space, powerfully illumined by four large, high, Gothic windows. The entrance to the tomb chamber is through a door with a Renaissance frame, which combines the motif of intertwining rods, frequent in monuments from the epoch of Stephen the Great, with receding arches, the whole being crowned by a classical cornice.

The space of the nave is dominated by the spire, whose tambour rests upon the original system of slanting arches known in Moldavia from the fourteenth century onwards

The master craftsmen who built Probota brought the Moldavian style to perfection, but the fame of the church is, to the same extent, also due to its murals. Probota was one of the first churches to be entirely painted with murals both inside and out.

The original murals were altered during restoration in 1844, when, over the paintings in the altar, nave and tomb chamber, a new layer of matching colours was applied. Over the entire height of the spire unfolds *the Heavenly Hierarchy*, dominated by the image of *Christ Pantokrator in majesty*. At the base of the spire, there is an ample Angelic Liturgy.

The greater part of the walls of the nave is reserved for illustration of *the Passion of Christ*, in numerous episodes with a taste for narrative.

The vault and the walls of the *gropnita*, as far as the level of the first register, illustrate the first six months of the Synaxarion. A scene is dedicated to each day, each surrounded by a red frame. As in all Menologia, the dominant is constituted by scenes of martyrdom.

In the narthex, the depictions from the Synaxarion continue, be they mystical or historical and moralising, while eschatological scenes are dominant in the porch. The entire east wall of the porch is reserved for *the Last Judgement*, the first illustration of the theme that will bring fame to sixteenth-century Moldavian mural painting.

In distinction to the interior, the former brilliance of the exterior murals is no longer to be found, and the north wall is now almost entirely erased, with entire compositions having lost their meaning. However, in the important themes that can be deciphered, they reveal their beauty, inscribing the entire mural ensemble of Probota among the most brilliant achievements of Moldavian art at the time

The south façade of the church: details of the exterior murals and Gothic window settings

The west portal of the church; details of the exterior murals, with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel

Interior view; details of the murals in the nave

Moldovita Monastery

The monastery church, view from the east

Like all the other foundations from the time of Peter Rares, the church of the Moldovita Monastery, built in 1537, is striking for its trend towards height and slenderness, its air of elegance and brilliance. Continuing the architectural conception crystallised during the time of Stephen the Great, the master craftsmen of Peter Rares perfected certain elements, such as, in the case of Moldovita, the very spacious narthex and the open porch with a high arcade. Along with the *tainita* – the room situated above the tomb chamber, between the nave and narthex – these are the elements that characterise Moldovita.

The system of vaulting likewise bears the stamp of architecture from the time of Stephen the Great. To be remarked in particular is the vaulting of the nave, where, in place of the four superposed arches arranged diagonally, which heightened the calotte, a system of eight intersecting arches was used, giving especial elegance to the vault, reflecting the light in each of the spaces created between the arches.

The exterior murals of Moldovita constitute, alongside those of Voronet, the most precious and beautiful ensemble among the monuments of Peter Rares, and are the only ones that have preserved the freshness of their colouring down the ages, particularly on the south side and the east apse.

The porch and the entire surface area of the west wall, on either side of the entrance, unfolds a sweeping *Last Judgement*, with dozens of figures arranged rhythmically in rows, heading towards the centre of the scene.

On the south façade of the church, there unfold themes specific to the age of Peter Rares: *the Akathistos Hymn of the Theotokos* and *the Tree of Jesse*. At Moldovita, the first achieves more than at Arbore or Humor an especial breadth and heightened narrative drama.

The registers with seraphim, cherubim, angels, prophets, apostles, martyrs and the faithful cover the three apses of the church, proceeding from the altar apse, where we

View from the south: the church porch; in the background: the museum

The monastery church, overall view from the south-west

The south façade of the church, with details of *the Akathistos Hymn* and *the Siege of Constantinople*

find the Theotokos enthroned, and moving towards the two lateral apses. The lively movements of the figures, the elegance of the outlines, and the humanity of the personages, the variety of the decorative motifs, the verve of the narrative, all give the murals of Moldovita its stylistic particularity.

The interior murals in general develop the old canons of Orthodox iconography, but there are also local elements: the architectural backgrounds that reveal the outlines of Moldavian churches, houses and cities, the costume of the figures, with traditional folk smocks and shirts, and even musical instruments, for example the alphorn used by shepherds.

In the fifteenth century, the monastery was home, as documents attest, to a school for calligraphers and illuminators of ecclesiastical texts.

Scenes from *the Siege of Constantinople*, south wall of the church

Sucevita Monastery

First documentary mention: 1581-1601.
Sucevita, Suceava county.

According to documents of the time, Sucevita Monastery was built on the site of an old hermitage, organised around a small wooden church dating from the early fourteenth century, founded by a family of boyars that would ascend to the princely throne in the late sixteenth century – the Movilesti. Built at a crossroads between the ages, in 1584, it would combine the heritage of the epoch of Stephen the Great with the now prefigured innovations of the following phase of Moldavian art, perfected a century later at Dragomirna by Anastasius Krimka.

With high, thick walls, imposing corner towers, buttresses and battlements, the fortified complex evokes the mediaeval ambience specific to the monasteries of sixteenth-century Moldavia.

The large monastery church, built upon a high plinth, repeats the most important building principles of Moldavian architecture and the classic plan of porch, narthex, *gropnita*, nave and altar.

The rhythms of the facades are traditional, with buttresses that give a gentle alternation of square and curved surfaces, balanced horizontally by bands of green (the dominant colour at Sucevita), which mark the ground upon which the depictions of seraphim, angels and saints will unfold in the sweeping murals that cover the exterior walls.

The exterior murals – the best preserved of all mediaeval Moldavian art – are characterised by the multitude of scenes, the taste for the epic, and the significant detail. Markedly narrative in nature, the work of master *zôgraphoi* Ion and Sophronie introduces into Moldavian painting a number of new elements, marking the beginning of the third period in its development. Thus, during the time of Stephen the Great, when it coalesced, mural painting was monumental in style and essential in symbolic and plastic representation. Towards the mid-sixteenth century, it becomes more animated and dynamic, with a tendency to valorise analytically the unfolding of action. Later, at Sucevita, the emphasis shifts towards epic development, with numerous details and highlighting of atmospheric elements.

The entrance portal, with *the Holy Trinity* in the lunette

The monastery complex, panoramic view from the south-west

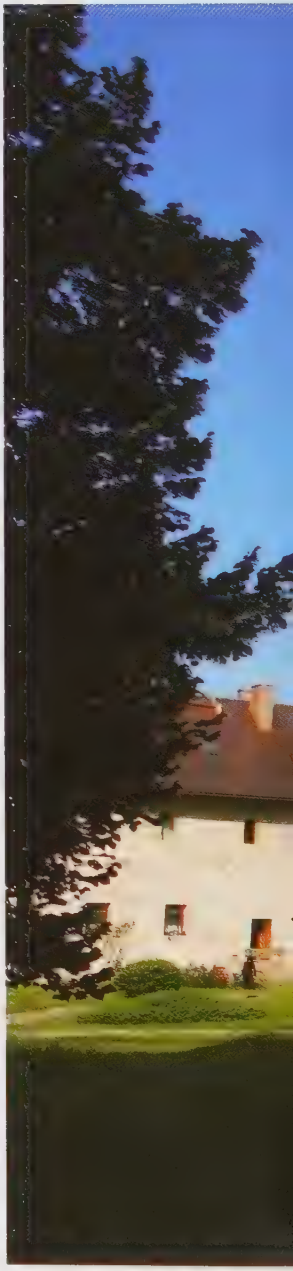
Pages 60-61:
Interior view, murals of the nave

The main theme of the exterior murals at Sucevita is the sweeping composition that covers the apses of the church, with the procession of seraphim, cherubim, angels, prophets, apostles, fathers of the Church, martyrs and the faithful, in the largest depiction of *the Prayer to All Saints* in Moldavian painting.

On the north façade, there is a depiction of *the Life of St Pachomius* and *the Ladder of Virtues*, both subjects bound to monastic spirituality and addressed to monks, together with *Genesis*, composed in eighteen scenes. The south wall unites two subjects that are often met in the iconographic programme of sixteenth-century Moldavian exterior murals: *the Akathistos of the Annunciation* and *the Tree of Jesse*, a monumental composition figuring the genealogy of the Saviour, from the line of David and the kings of the Old Testament. At its base, above the plinth, there is a frieze of ancient philosophers, symbolising the knowledge and wisdom of antiquity, which Christianity adopted and gave a new dimension.

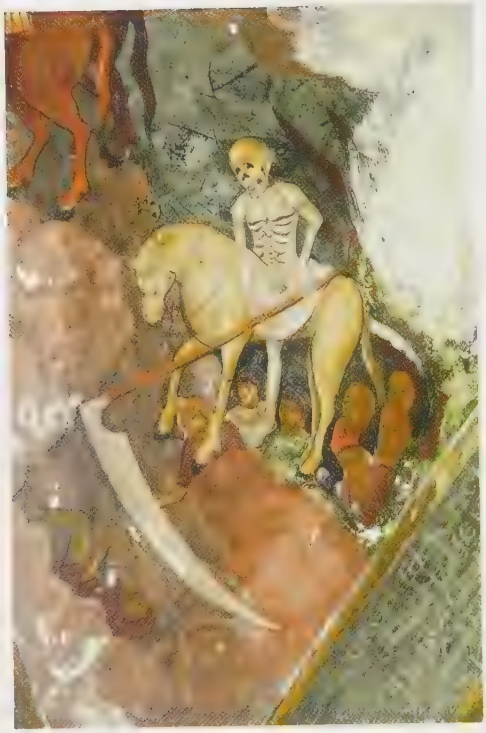
The iconography of the porch unfolds a veritable storybook in hagiographical cycles illustrating the lives of St John the Baptist and St John the New of Suceava, while on the east wall, which prepares the entrance into the church, there appears a monumental composition of *the Last Judgement*, with groups of the just and sinners distributed to either side of *the Throne of Hetimasia*

The interior murals display the same taste for the epic, narrative and atmospheric detail In the narthex can be seen the Menologion and the lives of two saints beloved in Moldavia: *St Nicholas* and *St George*, an occasion for the arrangement of the murals nto numerous small scenes.



The south façade of the church, scenes from *the Akathistos Hymn of the Annunciation* and *the Tree of Jesse*

The monastery church,
overall view from the north-west



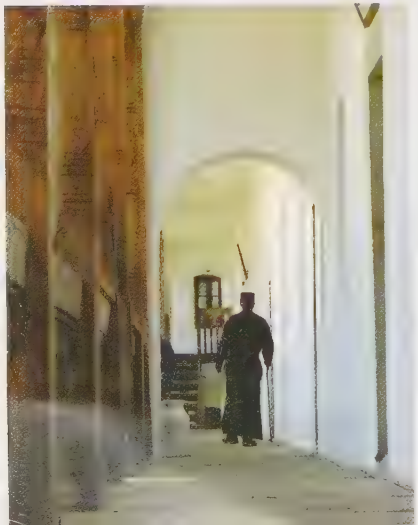
The north façade of the church depicts from the *Ladder of Virtues*, the Ladder of St John Climacus

Details of *the Last Judgement* porch of the church

Secu Monastery

Secu was founded by Nestor Ureche in 1602, on the site of an old hermitage where the abbot Zosima founded a school for monks to learn grammar, music, painting and sculpture.

The present aspect of the precincts and the buildings therein is the result of rebuilding in the early nineteenth century. The main church is also the result of successive interventions, and is distinguished by a series of innovations and deviations from the known formulae of the Moldavian style, still wholly in evidence at a monument such as Sucevita, built only eighteen years earlier. The spires no longer have stellate but rather octagonal bases, the same as in churches in Oltenia; a median band appears, dividing the façade in two, wholly absent in Moldavian architecture up to then, but widespread in Muntenia; the exterior buttresses are lacking. All these innovations give the church of Secu Monastery a character that is somewhat alien to the region.



In the interior, the blend of Moldavian and Muntenian forms, so obvious on the exterior, is less accentuated. The tri-conch plan preserves the usual arrangement of rooms: porch, narthex, tomb chamber, nave, and altar. The old system of vaulting with superposed arches no longer occurs here except in the tomb chamber, while the rest of the spaces are roofed with spherical calottes. The windows were subject to ulterior alteration, until they gained their current rectangular form, while the interior doors, which separated the rooms, have in their turn lost their stone setting. The porch has also been altered, with the lateral door to the north having been walled up

The original murals are preserved only in the niches of the lateral walls of the tomb chamber, where the founders are buried: Nestor (to the right) and Mitrofana (to the left). The scene that fills the circular space of a niche with *Jesus Christ enthroned*, *the Theotokos*, and *John the Baptist*, the latter two with phylacters in their hands and standing to either side of the throne, remain as testimony to high quality murals reminiscent of those at Sucevita and Dragomirna.

The buildings that today make up the precincts are adjoined or superposed on the old surrounding wall, whence the rather agitated appearance, with numerous belvederes and verandas. The oldest part is on the south side, where there is a room housing a rich collection of artefacts: wooden crosses, silver-bound Gospels, liturgical embroidery, icons, and old books, including the Miscellany of Varlaam, the celebrated metropolitan and writer, who dwelled at Secu, printed in Jassy in 1643.

Dragomirna Monastery

The monastery church, view from the east

Dragomirna Monastery, founded by "the last representative of Old Slavonic letters", Metropolitan Anastasie Krimka, was built by Moldavian masters in the early seventeenth century.

It has the form of a nave with a porch open to the west and a polygonal apse to the east, with a façade divided into two registers by a decorative band in torsade, segmented vertically into ten panels by the eight pilasters resting on the buttresses. The tall outline, accented by the slender tower, gives it its specific elegance. Gothic elements adorn the spire, window settings and arching beneath the cornice, to which are added oriental and Georgian influences, as well as echoes of folk art and the miniatures of illuminated manuscripts.

In the interior, the gradual heightening of the spaces from the narthex to the altar and the vaulting with intersecting nerves, a Gothic influence that Moldavian architecture was skilfully able to integrate into its system of building, are particularly striking. The *zôgraphoi* of Dragomirna added to the church especial artistic value through the chromatic and compositional harmony of the mural scenes, now preserved only in the altar and nave, in which they placed, besides traditional elements, features from Romanian folklore and details from manuscript illumination, thus giving the monument important documentary value.

The precincts were fortified during a turbulent period in history with massive defensive walls, a bell tower, and corner towers, thereby becoming a veritable fortress.

The old trapezium of the monastery has survived in its original form, with ample Gothic vaulting. The building now houses a museum, with a rich collection of manuscripts, icons, embroidery, and silverware, bearing the specific stamp of sixteenth-century Moldavian art.

The monastery complex, aerial view from the south-west

The spire of the church, decorated with plaques with geometrical motifs and stylised rosettes

The south façade of the church; window with a Gothic setting

Three Hierarchs Monastery

The monastery church, the sculpted masonry that covers the entire edifice

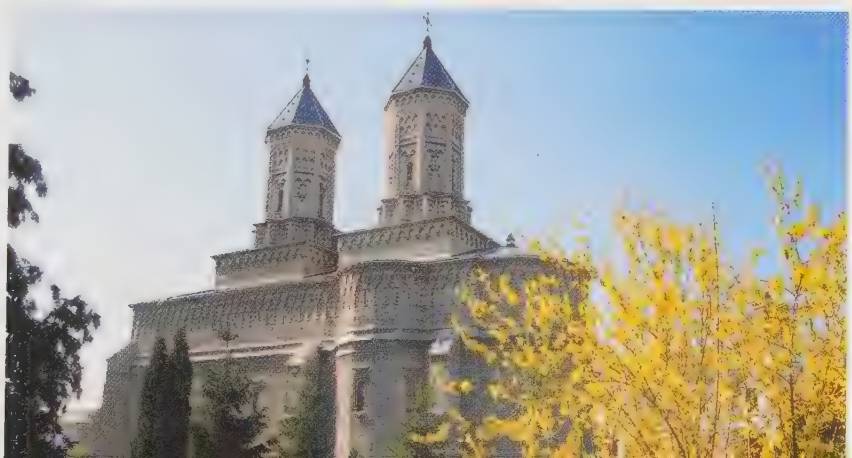
In the desire to erect a resplendent foundation unequalled in Moldavia, voevode Vasile Lupu built the Three Hierarchs Monastery, one of the most spectacular monuments of Romanian ecclesiastical architecture. Building began in 1635 and was completed in 1639, with the entire complex comprising a church, trapezium, abbot's houses and a bell tower. Its current form is the result of successive renovation, the most radical of which occurred in the late nineteenth century, when the spires, altar apse and interior columns were demolished, sacrificing the murals and many interior details. They were replaced by stone settings and taller spires, thereby giving the monument the slender forms by which we know it today.

The Church of the Three Hierarchs remains in terms of its plan and structure bound to the formulae of Galata and Dragomirna: a tri-conch in plan, two entrances arranged on the lateral walls of the porch. The decorative elements were borrowed from Dragomirna: the twisting median band, and the window settings. However, the originality of the monument does not reside in its structure but in the décor that garbs the facades, like an brocaded coat. The decoration is Armenian and Georgian in origin, the numerous motifs have folk origins, and the stone and wood carving is an original synthesis of traditional Romanian architecture and oriental art.

The narthex of the church is separated from the nave by three arches resting on massive columns with square capitals. The system of vaulting in the nave and narthex is that usual in Moldavian architecture, with arches on consoles.

The old murals made in 1641 by painters brought from Russia were replaced during restoration. Of the original murals only a few fragments now survive, exhibited in the Gothic trapezium and in the National Museum of Art: votive portraits, medallions with heads of angels and saints, remarkable for their harmonious colouring, the precision of their line, the naturalness of the gestures, and the diversity of the compositions. The votive portraiture displays modernity in the treatment of the figures, splendour and richness in the adornment of the vestments and ceremonial costume of Prince Vasile

The monastery church, view from the south-east



Lupu, his wife Tudosca, and their children Ioan and Ruxandra.

The splendour and tendency towards the decorative are also to be found in the embroidery, silverware and manuscripts preserved at Three Hierarchs, all belonging to an epoch that had a certain sensibility for sparkling colour, rich materials, incised ornament, painted or excavated in deep relief, displayed in volutes and friezes.

All these were at the centre of a new aesthetic, a triumph of plasticity, which the reign of Vasile Lupu imposed upon the artistic creation of the period, through the inclination for the accentuated and ample relief of detail carved in stone, embroidered with thread, or moulded in the stucco of an icon. This civilisation of the tactile will dominate the epoch in which the Middle Ages meets the modern period, which commences with the sumptuous tomb covering of Ieremia Movila and the spire of Dragomirna, in the 1610s, and continues with the exterior sculptures of the Church of the Three Hierarchs and the rhythmic pilasters of Golia. The spirit of these churches contains the entire history of Moldavia at the meeting of many paths, imbued with the breath of the western Baroque, but also the exuberant but highly symmetrical decoration of the East.

Detail of sculpted masonry; window setting

The monastery church,
general view from the south-east

Agapia Monastery

Agapia was built by Gavriil the Hetman, brother of Prince Vasile Lupu, on the site where monks from the Old Agapia Monastery, two kilometres away, moved their settlement, building a small wooden church. As at the old monastery, the church was dedicated to the Archangels, and was consecrated on 12 September 1647, as attested by the votive stone.

The church in the middle of the precincts is trefoil in plan, a design typical of the churches built during the time of Vasile Lupu, with an altar, nave, narthex, and porch. The dazzling white facades bear the imprint of the neo-classical style, and are reminiscent of nineteenth-century Muntenian rather than traditional Moldavian architecture.

On the exterior, the plasticity of the facades is limited to the arcs with floral motifs arranged above the windows and to the cornice of the roof. The spire above the nave, with its octagonal base, reminiscent of that at Galata, is vaulted with the system of Moldavian arches. The present, closed porch was added later, and is pierced by two large windows on the west side and to either side of the entrance, the old porch having been incorporated into the interior of the church.

The original structure was altered over time, whence its neo-classical aspect. Of the original building only the two massive columns between the narthex and the initial porch have been preserved, along with the semicircular apses, each pierced by a window, and the octagonal spire.

On the occasion of the extensions made in the late nineteenth century, the church was adorned with paintings by Nicolae Grigorescu, which now ensure its fame. The paintings, in the neo-classical manner, are far from the Byzantine spirit that characterised the art of Moldavian murals. Betraying realism (peasants and monks from the surrounding villages were used as models) and also the influence of Renaissance painting (some scenes repeat compositions by Titian, Raphael, Rembrandt etc.), in compositions that follow each other like canvases, with deviations from the iconography of the Orthodox Church, Grigorescu's paintings are nonetheless charming for their naturalism and attractive for their note of veracity.

The buildings in the precincts date from the time of the founders, and were repaired after the fire of 1821, when numerous workshops were built in the north wing. In accordance with a princely *khrysoboulion* (golden bull) issued in 1803, Agapia was transformed into a convent for nuns. It was then that a school was established for the learning of Greek and Byzantine chant, as well as to teach handicrafts such as sewing. The wishes of Prince Alexander Moruzi are fulfilled to this day by the nuns who work at the monastery making carpets and various embroidery.

Monasteries and churches of Muntenia and Oltenia

At first glance, this chapter brings together – from perhaps too broad and inclusive a perspective – not only monuments representative of the history and development of art, i.e. that formal and stylistic coalescence which constitutes the prototypes for a certain period, but also monuments interesting mainly to tourists. The location of the latter in picturesque, easily accessible areas makes them more visible, and even if they are not the most accomplished expression of the evolution in time of the architectural and decorative endeavours made by the founders and craftsmen of the respective epoch, they remain in the minds of many as the most representative.

At the same time, the chapter gathers together not only murals that are of the greatest value thanks to their age or originality, but also later achievements, more or less within the spirit of the Byzantine tradition or the specificity of mediaeval Romanian painting. What might constitute the limit of this eclectic, picturesque and perhaps incoherent mix, if we are thinking of a sole criterion for selection, might at the same time be its stated purpose: to offer in images and short texts a number of landmarks of Muntenian architecture over a broad chronological cross-section, from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, even if what we can now see at Cernica Monastery are the achievements of the nineteenth century, which partly leave behind the tradition upon which the rest of the monuments selected are founded.

Ultimately, the selection is subjective and that of an album, expressively and concessively, and the fact that a coherence of value cannot be preserved, unlike in the case of the other historical provinces, also relates to the specific of Muntenian art. However, in the background, beyond this presentation, there was always a coherent evolution of architecture, mural painting and decorative arts in the Muntenia and Oltenia of those centuries.

The fractures that this selection registers become visible only to the eye trained in identifying representative achievements and reconstituting typological series, perhaps thereby depriving of freshness a living and open reception of the beautiful which is, in its essence, that of any viewer of art.

Merely from the desire to provide an orientation in the chronology and typology of the history of art, let us say that the history of the monuments chosen begins with a foundation of Mircea the Old dating from the late fourteenth century: the church of Cozia Monastery. It is, perhaps, the most consummate expression of all the crystallisations of the age, which, let us not forget, begins with the Church of St Nicholas at Curtea de Arges, the most celebrated monument of its day, thanks to its cosmopolitan origins and Byzantine air. Cozia will henceforth play a leading role in the art of ecclesiastical architecture.

Then there is the Episcopal Church of Curtea de Arges, with its spires above the enlarged narthex, beyond the prevalence of the decorative visible in the composition of the exterior and the splendour of the polychrome ornamentation, which will not be repeated in any other structure in Wallachia. In its turn, the church will become, in the sixteenth century,

the prototype for subsequent interpretations, at Cobia and Caldarusani and, in a simplified form, even at Hurezi, among the examples to be found in our selection.

Tismana, although mentioned in documents dating back to the same period as Cozia, was rebuilt from its foundations, although it preserves its initial form. For the epoch of Matei Basarab, one of the most resplendent in Wallachian architecture, we have the example of Arnota, the princely necropolis since 1633. The seventeenth century saw a wide variety of solutions, with a permanent oscillation between innovative and traditional forms, the two being constant preoccupations of the craftsmen of the age: the belfry above the narthex, with access via a small tower added to the north façade, and the open porch, with arcades and columns, which will become widespread during the latter half of the century.

The Brancoveanu (and post-Brancoveanu) epoch, to which the complex at Hurezi, the church of the Govora Monastery, the church of Antim Monastery and the Stavropoleos Church in Bucharest stylistically belong, does not bring about essential changes in plan or elevation, but sees a development of the ornamental system and a modification in proportions, as well as that unity and harmony of all art forms that define it. It has been said of the structures of this genuinely original moment in Romanian art that they have a "literary refinement", which is proven by the sometimes literary richness and splendour of each of the examples chosen.

The quality of the decorative compositions and learned equipoise of the rich ornamental repertoire can also be recognised in the foundations of the boyars and high officials of the time: the Church of the Sinaia Monastery, founded by Mihai Cantacuzino the Spatharius, is an example in this respect.

The porch now transcends the traditional function of space connecting interior and exterior and becomes a true adornment of the church, with its composite capitals, columns with cable moulding, painted decoration and sumptuous portals. A model that may be cited in this respect is the Stavropoleos Church in Bucharest.

If we must list the elements that particularise the architecture of the Romanian Land, we should point to the tri-conch plan with one or more spires, the exterior divided into two registers by a median band, the richly decorated open porch, and the stylistic diversity that combines elements of the Baroque and the oriental décor of the Brancoveanu epoch. In spite of a wide variety of solutions, which our selection in itself demonstrates, we may speak of the persistence over the centuries of a traditional programme and the constant endeavour to discover new formal types, motifs and decorative systems. Perhaps this translates – albeit paradoxically, seemingly vaguely and generally – the most precise specific of Muntenian architecture.

Muntenia and Oltenia

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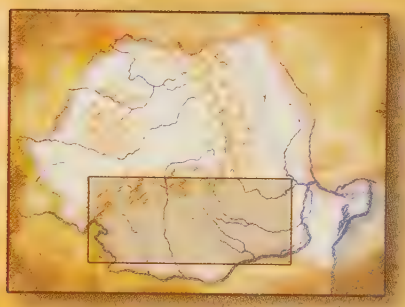


VRAGI

HUREZ

COZIA

CURTEA DE ARGEȘ

SINAIA

RM. VÂLCEA

ARGOVIȘTE

PLOIEȘTI

PITEȘTI

CĂLDĂRUȘANI

ANTIM

CERNICA

SLATINA

BUCUREȘTI

CRAIOVA

STAVROPOLEOS

Tismana Monastery

First documentary mention: 1375-1378, Tismana, Gorj county.

The gate tower leading into the monastery

Tismana Monastery is one of the oldest monastic establishments of the Romanian Land, having been founded in 1376 by Nikodim, to whose name is linked the reorganisation of Romanian monastic life after the Athonite model. He provided a genuine framework for life in the monasteries he founded, Vodita and Tismana. The rules established by Nikodim here were to be a model for the numerous monasteries later built by the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia. Tismana Monastery was built using donations from the princes of that time, the Basarab rulers Radu I, Dan I and Mircea the Old.

The monastery precincts are dominated by the main church, which is dedicated to *the Dormition of the Theotokos*. The church is a tri-conch in plan, with octagonal spires above the nave, narthex and porch, arranged in ascending rhythm from porch to nave.

The porch arranged on three sides around the narthex – a solution found by the craftsmen of the day which was also to be adopted at other churches a decade later – is lower than the rest of the structure and vaulted with semi-cylinders. Stone rosaces adorn the exterior of the lateral apses and the powerful buttresses give rhythm to the surface area. Without any structural function, the buttresses were added for decorative purposes.

In the interior, the nave is divided from the narthex by a massive wall pierced by an entrance. What is unusual is the treatment of the surface area of the nave, through placement of two small brickwork posts in the eastern part, dividing the nave into three uneven bays, with the middle bay, corresponding to the altar apse, being the largest. The monumentality of the nave is enhanced by the spire resting on four arches. The lateral apses are framed by two pairs of niches, those arranged to the west being semicircular.

The murals created in 1564 by Dobromir the *zôgraphos* were repainted in the eighteenth century in two different stages by different masters (the first stage was in 1732, the second in 1766, taking in the altar and the nave). In the narthex, the original murals were not destroyed and a new fresco was applied on top of them in 1766 by Deacon Dimitrie. These were in turn removed in the early twentieth century during restoration work, and can now be seen embedded in the walls of the monastery museum and along the corridors of the cells.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first register of the murals in the nave and the altar were covered up with a layer of oil paintings, applied over the paintings from 1732.

The murals in the porch date from 1994, and were painted by Grigore Popescu, one of the most authentic church painters, who works with a profound respect for Byzantine tradition.

Interior view, details of the murals in the nave

Cozia Monastery

First documentary mention: 1387, Calimanesti-Caciulata, Vâlcea county.

The monastery church, from the south-east

Founded by Mircea the Old in 1386, Cozia Monastery was consecrated by Nikodim of Tismana, who saw to its organisation. The faces of the two are depicted in the votive paintings in the nave and the narthex of the church respectively.

A tri-conch in plan, with a narthex, spacious, elongated nave, and semicircular apses, the church is built from large blocks of stone alternating with bare brick, and has a richly sculpted window settings, rosettes in the upper register, and courses beneath the cornice. Vertically, the facades are punctuated by elongated blind arches, which rise to beneath the cornice. The building and decorative techniques used at Cozia are reminiscent of the Serbian churches of the Moravia Valley, Ravanica and Krusevac.

The interior of the nave is divided from the narthex by a thick wall pierced by a door in its middle. The narthex is roofed with a vault, while the nave has an original system of vaulting: between the cylinder of the tambour and the pendentives that ensure the transition from the square of the architectural space to the circular space of the spire, the builders have intercalated a truncated conical ring that diminishes the diameter of the spire and lends suppleness to the vaulting.

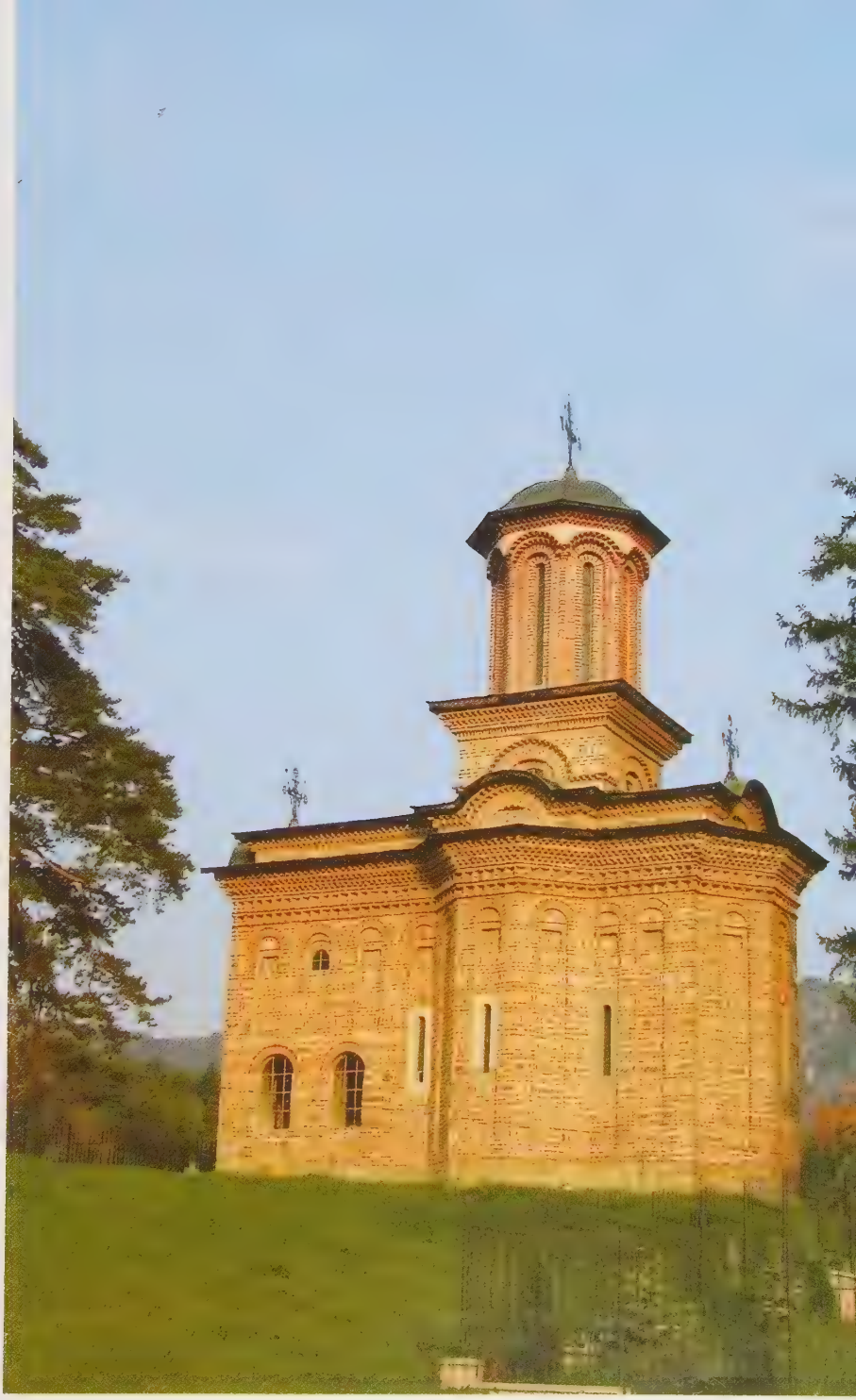
The porch was added later, during the time of Constantine Brancoveanu. The Serbian influences are due to the master who worked at Cozia, one of the architects of Knjaz Lazar.

The original murals, dating from the fourteenth century, are preserved only in the narthex, where there unfolds a sweeping *Menologion* and *Akathistos Hymn* in the upper register and over the vault. On the north and south walls, and partly the west wall, including the Vision of St Peter of Alexandria, there is a long frieze of the Seven Ecumenical Synods. The lower part of the walls of the narthex develops a scene of the saints, celebrated among which is the group of hermits on the north wall, with their long and emaciated figures, displaying the transition from a narrative conception of representation to one that is mystical and hieratic.

In the nave, on the west wall, there are portraits of the founders: on the right, Mircea the Old, with his son, holding a model of the church that he is dedicating to the Theotokos, who sits on a throne with the Son in her arms.

Besides the main church, the monastery also includes the Chapel of *the Dormition of the Theotokos*, built in 1792, and another chapel dedicated to *All Saints*, rebuilt in its present form in 1959. The cells that make up the precincts, like a citadel, are the result of interventions made during the time of Neagoe Basarab and Constantine Brancoveanu. On the south and north sides of the citadel are preserved the "princely cells", four verandas and the old kitchen from Brancoveanu times.

The most valuable part of the monastic complex at Cozia is the church of the infirmary, built in 1542 by Radu Paisie to tend to the spiritual needs of the old and sick. From the closed porch we pass directly into the trefoil nave, as there is no narthex. The murals have largely been preserved in their original form and are distinctive for their great chromatic refinement.



The Theotokos in glory, and details of *the Last Judgement*

The infirmary Church of *the Apostles*, south fa ade

Polovragi Monastery

First documentary mention: 1505
Polovragi, Gorj county.

The monastery complex, aerial view from the east

Polovragi was built around the year 1505, and was founded by brothers Radu and Petru, the sons of the great boyar Danciu Zamona. In 1647, the boyar Danciu Pîrîianu rebuilt the church in the form in which we see it today, dedicating it, together with all its wealth, to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It was bought back, fifty years later, by Prince Constantine Brancoveanu, who restored it and made additions.

The church is a tri-conch in plan, with an open porch resting on eight columns and vaulted with a calotte supported by four unequal arches. On the exterior, above the arches that connect the columns painted with floral and geometric elements, there is a mural of *the Theotokos with her mantle spread wide*, like a sheltering tent. On either side of the entrance, in the porch, there is a depiction unique in Romanian mural-painting: Mount Athos and its monasteries.

The plasticity of the façade is particularly animated: with a band of indented bricks that divides the wall into two distinct areas, the lower with horizontal bare-brick courses and graven stone, the upper with plain white plaster. The window settings are of graven stone, richly decorated in the upper part with various sculptural motifs, while at the base of the roof there is a cornice consisting of three rows of superposed bricks, set in a saw-tooth pattern.

On either side of the altar apse, there are two liturgical spaces specific to Orthodox worship: the proskomidion and the diakonikon. The murals are in the style of those at Hurezi, painted by the master craftsmen of Constantine Brancoveanu in 1738.

In the narthex, the first register is dedicated to the founders: Matei Basarab, Danciu Pîrîianu and Constantine Brancoveanu. Alongside the votive portraits, in the narthex there are scenes from *the life of the Saviour* and *the Akathistos Hymn of the Theotokos*, with *the Theotokos and Holy Child* in the calotte. In the nave, the image of Christ Pantokrator in the spire dominates the entire narrative of the murals, with scenes from the life of Christ and His miracles, and soldier saints in the upper register, while towards the altar apse can be seen Christ the Judge and the Theotokos and Child surrounded by hosts of angels.

The iconostasis, with its rich floral ornamentation, is chromatically integrated into the murals as a whole, while from the decorative and compositional point of view the Baroque and oriental forms articulate the Brancoveanu style.

The porch of the church, and the north corner of the monastery complex

The Episcopal Church, Curtea de Arges

First documentary mention: 1512,
Curtea de Arges, Arges county.

Of the monuments built down the ages to adorn the voevode capital of Arges, the church founded by Neagoe Basarab is the most celebrated achievement of ecclesiastical architecture. Begun in 1514, in the desire to create a monument of "matchless beauty", the church was finished three years later, on 7 January 1517, although the voevode did not live to see his foundation completed. The decoration of the building would be continued by the new Lord of the Romanian Land, Radu of Afumati.

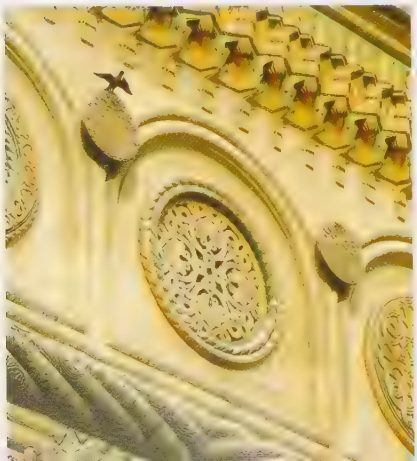
At present, after a series of restoration work in the nineteenth century, the church consists of a narthex, with the same breadth as the nave, fused with the structure proper, whose interior columns support a central spire with two lateral turrets, which crown the western façade of the church. The church is richly decorated, with the twisted cable moulding resembling thick coils of brickwork. The nave with apses that form the shape of a cross is dominated by a tall spire, which is joined to the structure by vaults, giving the architectural whole an unmatched slenderness.

The church lies on a vast pavement of stone blocks, larger than the surface area of the church's base, its edges terminating in carved stone lilies. The exterior walls are divided into two registers, demarcated by a median band of woven cable moulding. In the median register, there is a series of rectangular panels, with ornamental frames, in which the windows are fixed. In the upper part can be observed a suite of panels in the centre of which are placed decorative plaques and disks in rosette, while at the intersection of the arches there are other smaller disks.

Above, exceeding the short edges of the roof, placed along a number of parallel rows of chiselling, the structure of the church grows in a suite of volumes and surfaces, upon which rise the four spires. Richly ornamented, they gather around the windows, like lacework in relief, the same models in which (like the rest of the monument's decoration) are to be found in art of Arabic and Georgian influence.

The monastery church, view from the south-east

Decoration in sculpted stone; in the lunette, *the Theotokos with the Holy Child*



Interior view: the narthex (left)
and the iconostas s (right)

Cernica Monastery

Founded by Cernica Stirbei the Dvornik, Cernica is first mentioned in the princely *khrysoboulion* of Radu Voda Serban, issued in 1608.

A picturesque establishment at the edge of Bucharest, the monastery stands in the middle of a lake surrounded by centuries-old oaks, and consists of two imposing churches and a number of hermitages dedicated to the best-known amongst the saints.

The present church, *St Nicholas of Ostrov*, stands on the ruins of the first, and was built in 1815, when the monastic life of Cernica was re-established under the guidance of Abbot Gheorghe. The murals are by Fotache, while the emperor icons and portraits of the Abbots Timotei and Gheorghe were painted by Nicolae Polcovnicu, who also painted the church of the Patriarchate in Bucharest.

The second church that stands on the island of *St Gheorghe* was founded by St Calinic in 1831-2. It was rebuilt after being damaged, and the form in which we see it today is the result of restoration work carried out in 1939, when the paintings were cleaned by Iosif Kleber.

Abbot Gheorghe built the *Church of St Lazarus* in the cemetery in 1804. The church is small but of rich exterior decoration. It was also at that time that the abbacy was built next to the Church of St George and almost all the houses that bear the name of the same saint and martyr. A lover of culture, the abbot laid the foundations of the priceless library and opened a school of church painting. He was canonised in 1955.

The monastic complex also includes a chapel, on the south side of the cells, built in 1790, a museum, and on the Island of St Gheorghe can be found the cell of St Calinic, with a number of objects that belonged to him: vestments, books, bishop's crook.

Cernica is the place were a number of Romanian cultural figures are buried: Gala Galaction, Father Dumitru Staniloae, and painter Ion Tuculescu.

The *Church of St Nicholas of Ostrov*, view from the south-west

The monastic complex, view from the south-west

Arnota Monastery

Arnota Monastery,
view from the west

Founded by Matei Basarab in 1633-4, Arnota Monastery was built on the foundations of an older church, and was originally intended as a princely necropolis.

The monastery church is a small structure, with simple and sober lines, and was built to a trefoil plan, with polygonal apses and an open porch. Above the nave rises a tall spire on pendentives, octagonal both on the interior and the exterior. The narthex is vaulted with two calottes on pendentives, separated by an arch. The facades are separated by meann of a bare brick band in two registers: the lower with rounded niches and the upper with deep blind windows. The spires are decorated with ornaments of bare brick.

The porch has a spire added by Preda Brancoveanu in the early eighteenth century. It was also then that the iconostasis was rebuilt in the Brancoveanu style (to be found in the Museum of Art in Bucharest since 1913) and the murals renovated, without the original paintings being replaced.

Between 1852 and 1856, Prince Barbu Stirbei demolished the old cells from the time of Matei Basarab, already in ruins, and erected other buildings, designed by foreign architects.

The original murals have largely been preserved. The painter was Stroe of Targoviste, while Ioanichie Sin Preda worked in the narthex. Matei Basarab and his wife Elina are depicted on the west wall, and on the south and north walls are ranked the ancestors of the prince. The iconographic programme reveals the cultural policy of the prince and at the same time provides the funerary meaning of the monument through the association of scenes and the way in which they are positioned. In the spire of the nave, for example, Christ Pantokrator is depicted surrounded by figures from the Old and New Testaments, in a strict hierarchy that must have been the model for a mediaeval state in which the voevode is anointed by God. The presence of martyrs in numerous scenes accentuates the funerary meaning, with the association of *the Resurrection*, *Passion* and *Deisis* having the same role.

Interior view:
details of the votive painting in the nave, the voevode Matei Basarab and his wife Elina

Icons from the monastery museum painted by Nicolae Grigorescu: *Jesus Christ in glory* and *Ss George and Demetrios*

Panoramic view of the church from the south-east

Caldarusani Monastery

First documentary mention: 1637-1638.
Caldarusani, Ilfov county

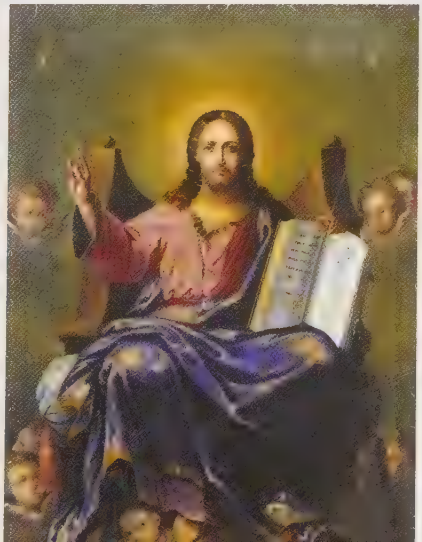
In 1637, Prince Matei Basarab built the Church at Caldarusani and a part of the defensive walls that surround it. In the following century, a trapezium and chapel were added, then the abbacy and the houses around the precinct, as well as an infirmary and other buildings to house the monastic community, which, by the end of the nineteenth century, was very large, numbering more than two hundred monks. The church, a tri-conch in plan, specific to the seventeenth century in Muntenia, with three spires and a large narthex is transitional – in its style and planimetric structure – to the Brancoveanu style, proper to the Romanian Land in the eighteenth century.

The large narthex with two openings on either side of the entrance, is the same height as the rest of the church, which gives the impression of being a common corpus, something also suggested by the continuous exterior decoration. The enlarged narthex, like that at Curtea de Arges, has two columns in the middle, and the passage to the nave is via the arch of the axis, flanked by two semicircular openings.

The murals preserve very little of the spirit of the seventeenth century, which is retained only by the votive paintings of Matei Basarab and the Lady Elina. The heads of saints in the upper register date from the repainting of the eighteenth century.

On the exterior, the decoration is completed by painted panels, placed above the median band. They preserve the original arrangement, but were redone in the twentieth century by painter Belizarie, in a manner that led to the deformation of the original character of the painting.

Caldarusani Monastery is, as its founder wished it to be, a place of faith and a treasury of art. The rooms in the buildings of the precincts house artefacts from the history of the Basarab family, in various forms of expression, from the manuscripts of the school of copyists of Acachie, to the printed books of Macarie and the Caldarusani school of icon painters, where Nicolae Grigorescu trained as an apprentice, leaving the monastery a number of icons.



Hurezi Monastery

The main church and the Chapel of the Theotokos, view from the south-west

Founded by Constantine Brancoveanu in 1688-1714, Hurezi is the consummate expression of the Brancoveanu style, which marked a renaissance in Romanian monumental art through the coherence and equilibrium of its forms.

Answering multiple needs – church, princely palace, necropolis, cultural foundation – the complex is conceived on a broad plan, organised in two axes. The main east-west axis comprises the monastery proper, with its two courtyards, with the church in the centre, the chapel on the west side, the hermitage of St Stephen, and, beyond the precinct walls, the infirmary. The north-south axis climbs from Hurezlior highway towards the monastery and includes the *Hermitage of the Apostles* and *the Hermitage of St John*, of which only ruins now remain. The tri-conch plan of the main church represents an interpretation of the plan of Curtea de Arges, the same as the Church of the Metropolis in Bucharest or Cotroceni Monastery. It is formed of a narthex, enlarged nave, with two lateral apses and an altar apse, flanked by the two absidioles: the proskomidion and the diakonikon. The facades are divided into two registers by a band of decoration in relief, framed by two rows of saw-tooth brick, the upper register being decorated with panels terminating in a semicircle, and the lower with rectangular panels interrupted by the five large windows with their richly sculpted frames. The band, the window frames, and the rosettes are reminiscent of manuscript illumination or embroidery of the period, with stylised vegetal motifs.

The open porch – an expression of Brancoveanu architecture – is supported by ten columns with capitals decorated with acanthus leaves, linked to each other by semicircular arches that preserve painted decoration. The entrance, framed by marble decorated with acanthus branches, which enclose the votive inscription, reveals a perfect harmony of wood and stone carving.

The monastery precincts, the corpus of cells

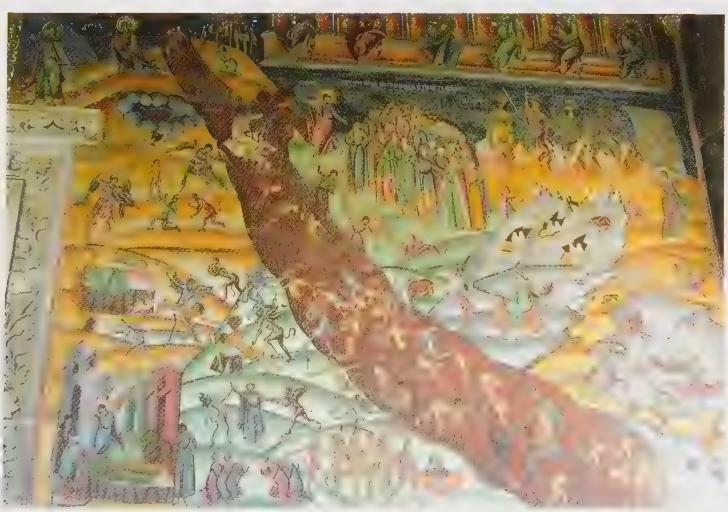
The murals were painted by a team led by Constantinos the Greek and are a standard for mural-painting of the epoch in Wallachia: with elongated figures, simple outlines, elegant gestures, a reflection of a manner belonging to the last period of Byzantine painting. Thematically, with numerous symbolic elements, they are connected to the Byzantine tradition but also mark the illustration of a local conception, the ideals of liberty and national independence, expressed in their turn by means of religious symbols.

The portraits of the founders, Constantine Brancoveanu and his entire family (on the east wall of the narthex) and then their genealogy – the Cantacuzinos (on the north and south walls), Neagoe and Matei Basarab (on the west wall) – provide the exact dimension of the pictorial refinement of the master *zôgraphoi*: they are varied, nuanced, with well-defined psychological characteristics, underlining prestige, wealth, delicacy, and beauty of features. Between them also appear the portraits of the masters who worked here or lay persons connected to the church: they have a much more realistic character, close to their real models.

The sources of inspiration for the masters employed by Brancoveanu to create the complex at Hurezi are different but in spite of the varied elements, the family air of all the buildings in the precincts emerges especially clearly and is an expression of the powerful personality of the founder.

The belvedere of Dionisius, stair with rich Brancoveanu-style stone carvings

Details of the murals of the porch: *the Theotokos in Glory* and *the Last Judgement*



Sinaia Monastery

First documentary mention: 1690

Sinaia was founded by Mihai Cantacuzino the Spatharius in 1690-95, after his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Mount Sinai (hence the name).

The old church is in the plan of a Latin cross, with rectangular apses, unusual for the period, but overall the style is specific to Muntenian architecture of the seventeenth century. The Brancoveanu-style porch has twisting columns adorned with stone carvings and a sculpted portal, showing *Moses with the Tablets of the Law* and *Aaron with the leafing staff*. The columns between the narthex and nave are also sculpted and have a twisting shaft.

The cupola of the porch is painted with scenes from *the life of St Catherine* (the patron saint of Sinaia Monastery), *St George* (protector of Moldavia and soldiers) and *St Demetrios* (protector of the Romanian Land) by Pârvu Mutu the Zôgraphos, the Cantacuzino court painter.

The votive painting represents the founder of the monastery, Mihail Cantacuzino, surrounded by his eighteen children, as well as other members of the family.

The chapel, built in 1695, is as old as the church. The original murals have been preserved, and are probably by an apprentice of Pârvu Mutu.

The new church, built between 1842 and 1846, and dedicated to the Holy Trinity, achieves a synthesis of architectural and

The monastery church, view from the south-west

The old church porch, west side: Slavonic inscription and details of murals

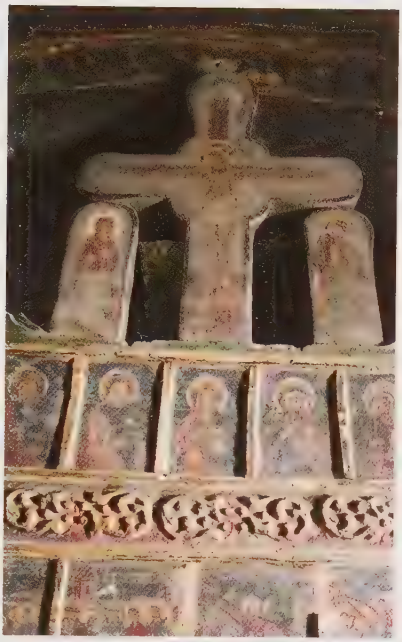
decorative innovations from the Romanian mediaeval period. It is a church with thick walls and powerful buttresses, like the monasteries of Moldavia, to which it adds elements proper to the Brancoveanu style. The large structure has the traditional planimetry of narthex, nave and altar, with a closed porch, in front of which there is a monumental entrance resting on four columns

The facades have a band of polychrome ceramics, above which there is a row of painted niches. The polychromatic façade also derives from the alternation of plastered brickwork with rows of bare brick

The murals are in the neo-Byzantine manner, painted by one of the team of restorers who came during the reign of King Carol I, who made a significant contribution to the development and renewal of the establishment

The votive painting depicts five figures, who symbolically summarise the history of the monastery: the Metropolitan Iosif, who re-consecrated the church in 1903, King Carol I, Queen Elisabeta, Princess Maria, and Mihail Cantacuzino the Spatharius. Behind the precincts – formerly royal buildings – a museum has been opened, housing old books and religious artefacts, including a Bucharest Bible, translated into Romanian and printed at the behest of Prince Serban Cantacuzino, in Bucharest, 1688

The old church seen from the south-west, and the corpus of monastic cells



The interior of the church
detail of murals, detail of
the iconostasis and view
towards the nave

Antim Monastery

Documentary mention: 1713-1715,

The monastery church, view from the east

On the site of an older wooden church, Metropolitan Antim Ivireanu built the Antim Monastery, dedicated to All Saints, one of the last monastic complexes to be created in the flourishing Brancoveanu epoch.

Initially, the monastery had the form of a citadel, with the church in the centre, surrounded on four sides by cells, with a tower at each corner. Now the precincts comprise the church, bell tower, an abbot's house dating from 1850, a chapel dedicated to Antim Ivireanu, cells, and a vaulted kitchen. In 1912, the Palace of the Holy Synod was added to these, built in the neo-Romanian style to the plans of architect N. C. Mihaescu and painted by Olga Greceanu in the spirit and tradition of Byzantine painting.

The church is a tri-conch in plan, with harmonious proportions, an open porch and a monumental portal. On the exterior, there can be seen a median band dividing the façade in two, an element specific to Muntenian architecture.

Of particular value is the sculpted decoration: the window settings, the capitals and pedestals of the columns with floral motifs in the classic Brancoveanu style, with a slight influence of the Italian Baroque. In the interior, the rich stone carving is repeated in the icon screen and the arched columns that divide the narthex from the large nave.

The original murals have not been preserved, and the present painting was executed during restoration in 1860 by Petre Alexandrescu in the neo-classical manner, with strong naturalist tendencies.

Above the entrance, under the inscription, there is a sculpted decoration by St Antim: the snail, symbol of faith and humility, framed by a wreath of laurels and with a star in the upper part.

Throughout history, Antim Monastery has been, in the spirit breathed into it by its founder, an important centre of culture.

Between 1938 and 1940, courses of the Academy of Church Music were held in the foundation of Metropolitan Antim. Antim was also the place whence a movement of spiritual renewal in the spirit of the Philokalia set out. In 1945, a group of monks and intellectuals known as the "Burning Pyre" initiated a series of conferences and meetings that dealt with the Prayer of Jesus, the relations between theology and science, and the continual encounter with Christ by means of the Prayer of the Heart.

Sculpted emblem of St Antim, the snail – symbol of faith, above the entrance, under the votive inscription

Stavropoleos Church

First documentary mention: 1724.
Bucharest

The church, with its rich Brancoveanu architecture, exterior details

Stavropoleos was built in 1724 by Greek archimandrite Ioanichie the Stavropolitan as an inn church. The buildings of the precinct were erected in the early twentieth century, according to the plans of architect Ion Mincu, in the neo-Romanian style.

Stylistically, the Stavropoleos complex belongs to the Brancoveanu epoch, and through its stone décor, furniture, interior and exterior mural paintings, is a unitary expression of this original period in the history of Romanian art.

The interior murals are impressive for their amplitude and at the same time the concentration of the iconographic programme, the synthetic expression of the dogmatic discourse and visual specific of a monastery church. Particularly expressive are the votive portraits of the family of Prinve Nicholae Mavrocordat and the founder Ioanichie.

The iconostasis, entirely preserved, belongs to the same Brancoveanu stylistic ambiance. There is a chromatic and decorative unity between the murals of the nave and the icons. The emperor icons, Russian in influence, are entirely preserved, the same as the entire register of feasts, apostles and prophets.

The exterior sculptures of the porch combine a rich repertory: cable-moulded columns, composite capitals and parapets with creeping stems surrounding the central scene – Sampson and the lion.

Beneath the cornice, the painted decoration combines harmoniously with the sculptural decoration and the stucco relief. The medallions with saints are surrounded with a rich weave of creeping stems which is continued in the decoration of the portico, thus creating a unitary image overall, the portico being integrated, in elevation and décor, into the general composition.

Images from the interior: details of the murals in the nave (*the Crucifixion*) and the base of the spire (*the Angelic Liturgy*)

Among the foundations of the early eighteenth century, Stavropoleos Church is imposing for its picturesque originality, achieving a unique synthesis of Brancoveanu elements and repertoire with oriental and western influences of the period.

Inside the buildings of the precincts, there is a collection of artefacts – icons on wood and glass, liturgical objects, fragments of fresco – a library with a rich collection of books, the most significant being the fund of musical manuscripts, and a community hall used for seminars and meetings on subjects related to theology, art, and history.

The inner courtyard of the precincts, built to plans by architect Ion Mincu (1904)

Monasteries and churches of Transylvania

For Transylvania, perhaps more than for the other Romanian provinces, what was decisive in forming an architectural specific remains the denominational regime. Architectural programmes are inseparable from the Church, politics, and the institutional policies of the time. In the case of Transylvania, we can no longer speak of the foundations or donations of princes, but of knjaz or noble founders, or, for wooden architecture, the foundations of communities or villages, which flourished at that time.

Although ecclesiastical art in the Transylvania of the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries also has other forms than those presented in our selection – if we think of the Romanic, Gothic and Baroque cathedrals of the major cities – what is expressive are the two moments rendered in the images and monuments chosen for this chapter: the fortified churches of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries and the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century wooden churches of Maramures. To these can be added the desire to capture the spirit of traditional Orthodoxy in a monument of post-Brancoveanu provenance – the Brancoveanu monastery, a transplantation of the Muntenian tri-conch on the other side of the Carpathians.

There is also a tri-conch at Prislop: the Cozia prototype and Brancoveanu-style painting are in this case too testimony to the permanent links between the Romanian provinces and their Churches, just as in the case of those post-Brancoveanu pictorial layers dating from the eighteenth century, superposed over the original thirteenth-fifteenth century layers at Gurasada, Prislop and Ramet.

It has been said of the fortified churches of Transylvania that they are similar to the churches with exterior murals in the north of Moldavia for the stylistic identity of a place and an epoch. Typologically, they belong to a category of mediaeval monuments, an expression of a cultural and artistic horizon in which can simultaneously be recognised the desire of a denomination or monastic order to impose itself and the desire of the the social and political leaders of the day to assert themselves.

Contamination with Romanic architecture and early Gothic influences is due to monuments of the thirteenth century such as Santa-Marie Orlea and its miniature replica at Strei, which remained for centuries the prototype in the medium of the Hunedoara *knjazija*: they are hall edifices with a rectangular sanctuary, with vaults on ogives and a belfry on the west side, austere in appearance, with decoration reduced to a minimum. The building technique to a large extent has a word to say in defining the exterior aspect of these monuments. The same stylistic areas also belong to the church at Gurusada, even if its plan is an isolated model, a result of intermingling of the tri-conch type from Muntenian architecture with the plan of the four-lobed cemetery chapels or the church at Ramet, a type of adaptation of Romanic plan with a semicircular apse to an Orthodox spatial programme with the traditional separation into altar, nave and narthex.

Whereas the twelfth to thirteenth centuries bring via Saxon colonists or Catholic monastic orders forms of the Romanic and Gothic that craftsmen – foreigners at first and then locals – transpose in Transylvanian architecture, the fourteenth century achieves the synthesis between the models adopted from the Byzantine world, on the one hand, and that of the Catholic West, now under the dual authority of the mature Gothic and the Italian early Renaissance, on the other.

One synthesis remains the church at Densus, which sets out from a spatial conception of Byzantine origin – being an edifice with a central plan – but resorts to structural solutions and decorative elements that are rather Romanic in source. The appearance of the monument is, however, powerfully, marked by ancient sculptural elements found everywhere, in a free composition that is absolutely free and of great expressiveness, for which reason we might say that their image is also a result of these reflections of ancient architecture on a Byzantine plane.

Murals too constitute an art of synthesis that valorises both elements of the language proper to Byzantine-Palaeologine painting and suggestions from Gothic painting, a Gothic linear narrative, with flat surface areas and clumsy execution.

For the Transylvania of the eighteenth century, two phenomena remain definitive: the construction of cathedrals and Baroque palaces in the major cities and, on the other hand, the development of the centres of folk crafts, of workshops of mural- and icon-painters, who will provide one of the most expressive forms of art in the rural medium within the framework of the wooden churches of Maramures.

The genesis of the Maramures wooden church must be linked to Gothic stone architecture, with those hall churches built in stone and brick beginning in the thirteenth century. The wooden monuments date mainly from the eighteenth century, but it is certain that wooden churches existed, according to experts, from the fourteenth century onwards. Only against the background of a strong tradition and good knowledge of the material and its potential could the masters have achieved what they did in the Lapus Land, the Iza and Cosau Valleys, churches present in a large number in the present selection (Ieud, Barsana, Surdesti, Plopis, Budesti).

These are hall churches, terminating with an unhooked apse, with a tall two-tiered roof. Definitive for their appearance is the belfry, with its slender outline, with a gallery of arcades and a tall pyramidal cap, the latter reminiscent of the Gothic steeple. The interior of the church is most often simple, and the murals, icons on wood and glass, the textile pieces, and furniture form a whole that is situated at the border between religious and folk art. They are created by *zôgraphoi* and craftsmen, trained in folk media, who paint churches, icon screen and icons inspired by the illustrations of books printed in Wallachia and Moldavia, from icons on glass and popular woodcuts, which in their turn were the result of interferences between post-Byzantine tradition and the western Baroque, interpreted in a folk manner. But in all these images, be they indebted to tradition or to external influences, what is penetrating is an innovative conception in the manner in which the compositions are achieved, and elements of landscape or architectural details are incorporated.

Situated along these co-ordinates, ecclesiastical art in Transylvania can affirm in any epoch the same characteristics: integration of traditional Byzantine and western elements, be they Romanic, Gothic, Renaissance or Baroque, the interpretation and adaptation – depending on the religious denomination of the church in question – of space and iconographic programme into a permanent attempt to achieve a synthesis between local and western, provincial and national, tradition and renewal.

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RÂMEȚ
ALBA IULIA
ASADA
SIBIU
SÂMBĂTA DE SUS
BRAȘOV
PRISLOP
STREI
SÂNTĂMĂRIE-ORLEA
HAȚEG
DENSUȘ

The Church of St Nicholas, Densus

First documentary mention: thirteenth century.
Densus, Hunedoara county.

The Church of *St Nicholas*, view from the east

The church in Densus is one of the oldest and strangest churches in Romania. Standing on the ruins of an ancient structure, dating from the fourth century, the thirteenth-century church was built using blocks, marble, columns and statues brought from the former Roman colony of Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa, situated ten kilometres away.

It is square in plan, with a semicircular altar apse pieced by windows created from large stone slabs. The tower is made up of two superposed prismatic forms, and it is like the trunk of a pyramid in appearance, being supported on the interior by four stone posts made from Roman funerary slabs, which pierce the central space of the nave.

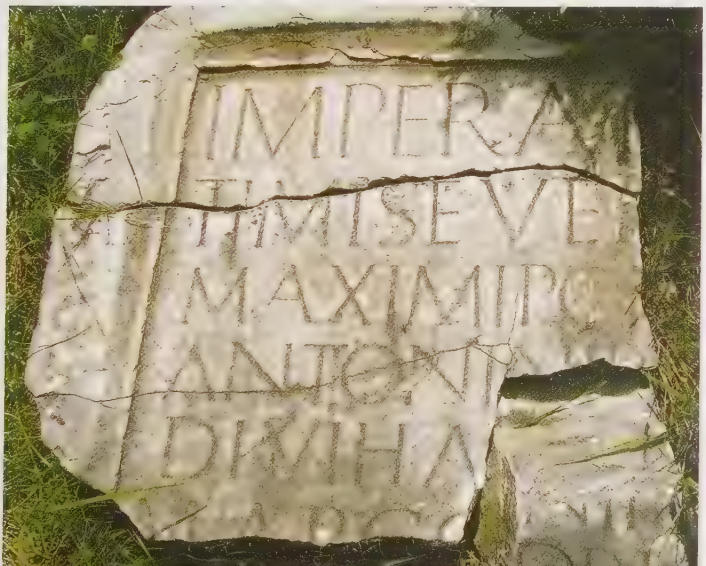
On the exterior, what is spectacular is the plasticity of the walls built from materials taken, for the most part, from ancient ruins: large slabs, bricks with Roman inscriptions, capitals, tombstones, drainpipes, columns and fragments of columns. On the north side of the nave, Roman columns recovered from ancient tombs have been added in the form of false buttresses, their role being decorative rather than structural, thereby creating a vertical rhythm to the façade. Also on the exterior, one may remark the decorative bands made up of bricks in a zigzag pattern, so-called Lombard bends, which, in contrast to Santa-Marie Orlea and Strei, where they were used only beneath the pyramidal cap of the belfry, are here found in abundance.

On the south side of the church, a small space, the diakonicon, has been added to the altar, and another space, with a semicircular vault, to the length of the nave, which is supposed to have been intended to shelter the few monks who dwelled inside the church. The Orthodox monasteries of the area at that time were not formed according to the known pattern of coenobitic complexes, with a church and annexes contained within a precinct. These first Hatzegan monastic churches were, throughout the Middle Ages, modest establishments with cells in the interior of the church itself. The monastic purpose of the church did not, however, last more than one hundred and fifty years. In the fifteenth century, a cemetery was laid out nearby and, due to the need to shelter a large number of the faithful, a narthex was added to the west side of the church. It then became a parish church.

The exceptional architects of this church added in 1443 murals, painted by two *zôgraphoi*, the name of one being inscribed in the altar apse as Stefan.

The image of the church in Densus is unique in Romanian architecture because its history is unique, being the oldest palaeo-Christian basilica in Romania that has been

Fragment of an inscription in Latin



preserved in situ. It is supposed that on the site where the church now stands, there was previously a mausoleum dedicated to Roman general Longinus, or else a Roman villa. It became a palaeo-Christian basilica between 337 and 450, in the period of massive Christianisation, following the missions of St Niceta of Remesiana and his followers.

After the barbarian invasions of the seventh century, the development of Christian life was interrupted, and paganism restored. It would not be until a century later, after the assimilation of the Slavs into the local population, that the Christian life would flourish, under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Spiritual development begins in the thirteenth century, when the church becomes an Orthodox monastery, then becoming a parish church for the inhabitants of the village, as it is today

It is a unique example in Romanian architecture of the integration of elements of pagan edifices into a Christian structure, and its originality and expressiveness inscribe it among the pinnacles of the Transylvanian Middle Ages.

The courtyard and entrance to the church

The church and churchyard,
view from the south-west

Ramet Monastery

First documentary mention: 1214.

The monastery precincts, with the two churches seen from the north-east

The church of Ramet Monastery, built in 1214, has elements common to the Hunedoara foundations built by the Romanian *knjazija* in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, respectively the architectonic mass specific to the churches of the Hatzeg Land, the mono-nave plan of Romanic influence terminating in a semicircular apse to the east, and the massive tower on the west side.

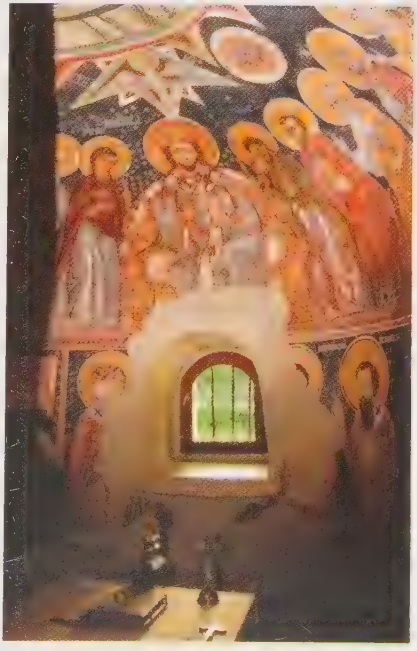
Beyond these resemblances, there also occur a series of differences which define the specific architecture of this monument, indicating a more evolved phase in relation to the Hunedoara group. The Romanic plan with a semicircular apse in the interior and on the exterior is adapted to Orthodox worship, with the interior being separated into nave, narthex and altar. One particularity is the system of vaulting in the altar, in a semi-calotte rather than crosses in ogives. The nave is divided in two by a wall with an arched opening: the narthex is vaulted in a semi-cylinder arranged transversally, and the nave is vaulted in a semi-cylinder axially. The tower is no longer adjoined to the western extremity of the nave, but rises above the narthex.

The murals were painted in a number of stages, and the oldest layer dates from the early fourteenth century, preserving a fragment with Christ in the tomb on the left of the altar apse, in the proskomidion, and a scene of martyrdom in the nave. Both are the works of a painter who came form an artistic medium characterised by the synthesis of Byzantine and western Gothic influences.

The second layer of murals dates from 1376, as attested by the inscription in which the name of the painter is also mentioned: Mihu of Crisu Alb, a leading light in the local school of painting, which was an organic part of the sphere of Byzantine art. It is to Mihu that the painting in the narthex is due, on the east wall: busts of saints and a broad *Deisis* on the arch that separates the nave from the narthex. The painting is remarkable for its sure and expressive line, the individualised figures, and the rich chromatics.

In 1741, the altar apse was repainted: of this third layer of murals, this time post-Brancoveanu in style, painted by Gheorghe of Fagaras, depictions of church hierarchs have been preserved on the walls of the apse, and in the calotte there is an unusual elaboration of *the Holy Trinity*, with *the Ancient of Days* at the centre, *the Holy Ghost* and *Jesus the High Priest enthroned* to either side. The painting is characterised by lines of great finesse, and the rich chromatics, dominated by warm colours.

The altar apse, detail of *the Deisis* mural



The Church of Santa-Marie Orlea

The church, from the south-east

The Church of Santa-Marie Orlea was built in stone by the *knjazija* of the Cande family in the late thirteenth century. The dating of between the years 1270- and 1280 has been made by setting out from the decorative and architectural elements indebted to the late Romanic and Gothic, then imposing itself in Transylvania.

Now a church of the Reformed denomination, in its first phase of existence it was used by a community of Catholic colonists, after which, in 1447, it became the property of the Canda family from Rîu de Mori. The plan is of the hall type, with a rectangular nave and a vaulted altar.

Interior view,
the murals in the nave

In the western part, the structure is dominated by a high, separate belfry, initially protected in its upper part by a conical cap, intersected by four triangular frontons, a model that would also be adopted by the *knjaz* foundations in the Hatzeg Land, at Strei, Densus, and Rîu de Mori. The stone portal at the base of the tower is decorated by two columns and a pilaster, continued by three receding semicircular archivolts.

The murals combine many layers, painted in successive stages. The first, comprising ten crosses of consecration distributed from the apse of the altar to the narthex, belong to the stage of the church's construction. The second, painted in the nave, is attributed to an anonymous master of Dalmatian origin, active in Transylvania in the early fourteenth century, who reached Santa-Marie Orlea in 1311. He thus originated from a milieu where Serbian and Italian influences were present and easy to transmit. The murals in the narthex, dated to the early fifteenth century, were made by a painter with western training. The other murals, on the east wall of the altar, depict the subject of *the Cortege of the Apostles*, and are executed according to Orthodox tradition, with Slavonic inscription, in a late Byzantine style, and were probably painted by a *zôgraphos* brought from south of the Carpathians.

After 1447, when the church was already in the possession of the Cande family, a tribune resting on two orthogonal posts was added to the west of the nave.

The Church of the Archangel Michael, Gurusada

[illegible] tion: 1292
[illegible]

Among the churches of the Hatzeg Valley, the Church of *the Archangel Michael* at Gurusada, built in the late thirteenth century, has a distinct appearance, being four-lobed in plan, with two elongated apses along the east-west axis, and two semicircular lateral apses. The nave is dominated by a spire in the form of a prismatic tambour, illumined by windows on the four sides. The materials used in the construction of the church, including those for the vaults, are river stone and raw stone.

The church at Gurusada, the former parish church of a community of Romanians, illustrates the choices of the local population, which maintained close links with the Byzantine world. This can be seen in the four-lobed plan crowned by a spire, planimetry that is reminiscent of the form of the Greek cross in Byzantine art.

A spacious narthex was added to the monument, formed of three compartments vaulted with longitudinal semi-cylinders. In 1756, the bell tower was built, adjoined to the west side of the nave, and the murals were painted. It is possible that the lateral spaces of the narthex, built immediately after the central four-lobed nucleus, may have been intended to shelter, as at Densus, a small monastic community, since the church was a monastery place of worship.

It is known that the church was decorated with murals as early as the fourteenth century, but the present paintings date from 1765, as is recorded in the inscription on the west wall of the narthex. Two masters worked on the murals, one from Transylvania and one from Wallachia, which explains the stylistic differences between the nave and the narthex. In the nave, the general organisation of the murals, remarkable for their balance, logical articulation of the wall surfaces, and rigorous composition, indicates the presence of a master with evident workshop training, Nicolae of Pitesti. In the narthex, the subjects are treated more freely. The murals have been attributed to a Transylvanian master, Ioan the Hiero-deacon from Deva, on the basis of the inscriptions of local influence. The murals are, however, unitary and can be inscribed within the stylistic area of eighteenth-century painting, due to their iconographic programme, vigorous lines, frames, and Brancoveanu-style decorative elements. They are testimony to the collaboration between a Muntenian and a Moldavian master.

The iconostasis dates from the late eighteenth century and was painted by Popa Simion Zugravul.

The Church of *the Archangel Michael*, north-west view

The Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Strei

first documentary mention: early [illegible]

The Church of *the Dormition of the Theotokos*, Strei, view from the west

The Orthodox church at Strei was built by local masters from recycled Roman blocks of stone, as a smaller replica of the foundation at Santa-Marie Orlea. The mono-nave plan, massive bell tower, system of vaulting in the altar, and the decorative treatment of the western portal all support this hypothesis.

The bell tower, nave and rectangular, almost square altar belong to the first stage of construction, dated to around the year 1300. In the latter half of the fourteenth century, a large narthex was added, incorporating the belfry. The result was a small but well-proportioned rectangular church, a short nave with a semi-cylindrical vault, and a detached altar apse, vaulted in a cross with ogive on massive stone nerves. The belfry on the west side is capped by a roof in the form of a helmet and has three rows of superposed windows; the windows are geminate in the middle area.

The monument preserves a significant surface area of murals: a few fragments are still preserved on the exterior (in the lunette of the portal, on the east and south facades), but in the interior, the murals restored between 1970 and 1972 are considerable and can be seen in the altar apse, in the nave, on the east and south walls, and, fragmentarily, on the west wall and on the ground floor of the belfry.

The murals of this *knjaz* foundation, datable to the latter half of the fourteenth century, were made by a group of painters who have a style and a language linked to the Romanic tradition but contaminated by Gothic influence. The principal painter, identified with the help of the inscription adjoined to his portrait in the altar apse, is "Grozie, son of master Ivanis". He painted the altar apse, with *Christ in Glory*, *the Cortege of the Apostles*, in which *the Virgin Mary and Child* is integrated in an unusual way, and the Hierarchs, alongside whom appear the outlines of churches. In the nave, on the south wall, he painted scenes from the Life of Christ (*the Nativity*, *the Adoration of the Magi*, *the Flight into Egypt*), and on the west wall *the Last Supper*. In the second register there are fragments of scenes from the life of *the Theotokos, St Catherine,* and *St Mercuria*, and above the triumphal arch there is a board *Annunciation*. The style of Grozie is indebted to the Romanic-Gothic tradition, with a certain calligraphic linearity in the drawing, with a sense of the decorative, and remarkable colourist qualities.

The second author painted the scenes in the lower register of the south wall: *the Forty Martyrs*, *St Nicholas*, *the Theotokos with the Holy Child among the saints*. The scenes are surrounded by frames, and the style of the painter bears the imprint of the early Renaissance, with fine gradations of light and shade, but preserving numerous elements of Byzantine tradition.

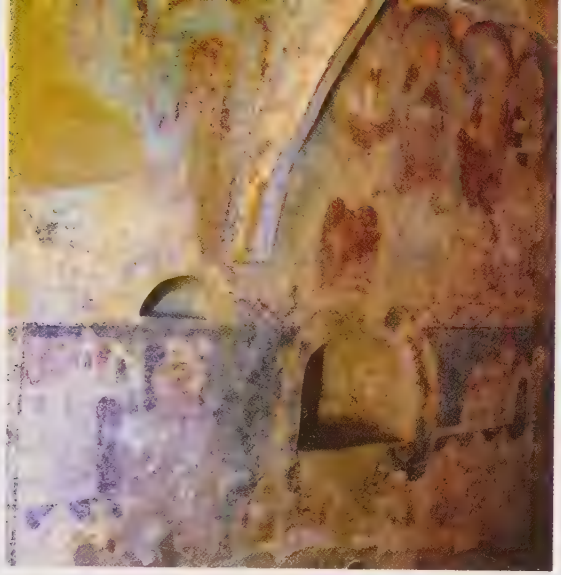
The third painter at Strei is distinct from the others. He represents the Romanian milieu of Byzantine tradition in late fourteenth-century Transylvania. He is the author of the frescoes that depict the builders of the edifice, the votive painting on the ground floor of the tower, and the scene of *St George* in the same space. His painting has a graphic character, with static personages and a chromatic range different from that of the other painters who worked at Strei.

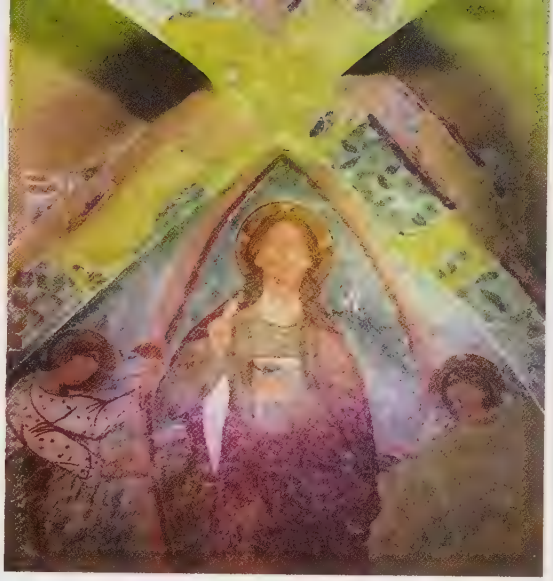
On the exterior, on the east wall, it is still possible to make out a faded *St Christopher with Christ on his shoulders*, a large scene, and in the lunette of the portal *Christ in the Tomb*.

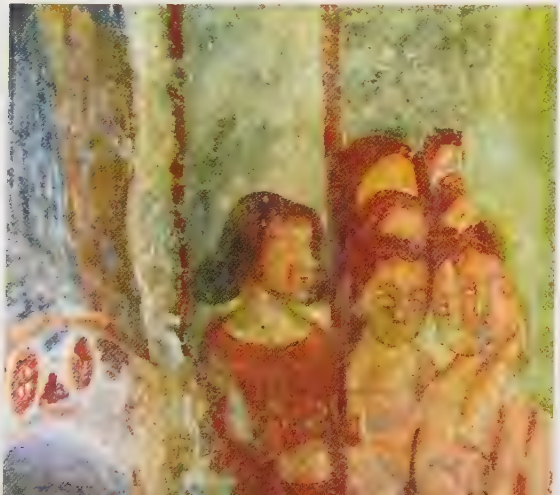
The murals at Strei are particularly valuable, and they illustrate the phenomenon of artistic osmosis in fourteenth-century Transylvania, which occurred in the area where Byzantine and Western style met. Testimony to this are both the iconographic programme and the plastic treatment of the themes, but also the knowledge of Old Slavonic and Cyrillic, as proven by the inscriptions, which reveal the closeness of the masters to the native written culture.

Images from the interior, details of the altar painting

The exterior of the church, with an embedded Latin inscription







Barsana Monastery

First documentary mention: 1390,
Barsana, Maramures county.

The history of the Barsana Monastery begins in the fourteenth century: a document from 1390 records that there was a monastery in this place. Around 1739, the first Orthodox bishop of Maramures stayed here before the Bishopric was disestablished. Barsana Monastery resisted pressure against churches in the area until 1791. The number of monks dwindled, the cells were destroyed, and the monastery's property was confiscated by the Hapsburgs.

The old church of the monastery belongs to the group of wooden churches in Maramures, but has its own characteristics. The plan is traditional, with a porch supported by columns, a narthex, and a nave, all forming a rectangular corpus, to which is added a separate altar apse. It is a hall type church, and the interior is segmented by dividing walls. The entrance from the portico into the narthex is via a door, whose frame has cable moulding in high relief.

The murals, as recorded by an inscription on the wall to the right, were painted "in the year of Our Lord 1806", when "I Toader Zugrav and I Plohod, painter from Drago(miresti) painted this holy church".

The murals are structured according to the laws of Baroque art, whose influence in Transylvania was becoming ever more felt in Transylvania at the time, including in folk art. Also of western Baroque influence are scenes on the vault of the apse, for example *the Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity*, surrounded by angelic hosts.

On the walls of the altar, there are scenes connected to the Holy Eucharist, hierarchs, and saints. In the nave, there are episodes from *Genesis* in twenty successive scenes and, in parallel, *the Passion Cycle* in eighteen episodes. The lower registers render subjects connected to the miracles and parables of Christ, and on the vault there are various scenes united by their eschatological message.

Of the murals of the narthex, only a fragment is preserved on the south wall, representing the hosts of the righteous at *the Last Judgement*.

The iconostasis can be categorised within the same stylistic area of the Baroque, both by its icons and the sculpted decoration that adorns them. Above the emperor icons, monumentally treated, with *the Theotokos Empress with the Child enthroned*, and *Christ Emperor enthroned*, there is a row of feast-day icons, separated by cable-moulded columns. It is the work of Toader Hodos.

This was an abbacy church (under the authority of Basilian Uniate monks) from the late eighteenth century, and was transformed into a parish church in 1806. In 1993, it was re-consecrated as a monastery.

Details of the murals in the nave: *the Last Supper*, *the Washing of the Feet*, and *the Judgement of Christ*

The bell tower and wooden roof of the church

Prislop Monastery

First documentary mention: 1404
Silvasu de Sus, Hunedoara county

The monastic establishment at Prislop was founded, according to tradition, at the beginning of the fifteenth century by Nikodim of Tismana, a pilgrim in Transylvania at that time, out of the wish to strengthen Orthodoxy and monastic life in this part of the land. The Lady Zamfira, daughter of Moise Voda, Lord of the Romanian Land between 1520 and 1530, is reckoned in his turn to be a founder of Prislop Monastery, being the one who restored it in 1580.

Today, of the old monastery, only the church remains, tri-conch in plan, with semicircular apses on the exterior and in the interior. The lateral apses are framed by pilasters which create niches to either side of the interior nave, as at Cozia or Tismana, a fact which attests the influence of Nikodim on the master builders.

The nave is dominated by a tall spire, and the narthex has a transversal vault. The circular course of the apses and the radial arrangement of the windows represent echoes of the Gothic assimilated in structures of the Balkan-Byzantine tradition, from whose interference resulted an original synthesis in fourteenth-fifteenth-century Transylvania. Also original is the stone exterior, whereas the interior has suffered many interventions to the murals.

Restoration at the beginning of the twentieth century ascertained the existence of three pictorial layers. At present, the original murals are preserved in the upper part of the narthex, with scenes from *the Akathistos Hymn of the Theotokos* and *the Life of the Saviour*. An inscription discovered during restoration mentions that the church was adorned with paintings on 13 March 1759 by painter Simion of Pitesti and his disciple Nicolae. They also made the exterior paintings on the west wall, of which only the icon of *St John the Theologian* enthroned and flanked by two angels still survives, together with a few scenes from *the Last Judgement*. To the right of the entrance can still be seen the river of flame, on the left fragments of Paradise, and in the middle a schematic landscape.

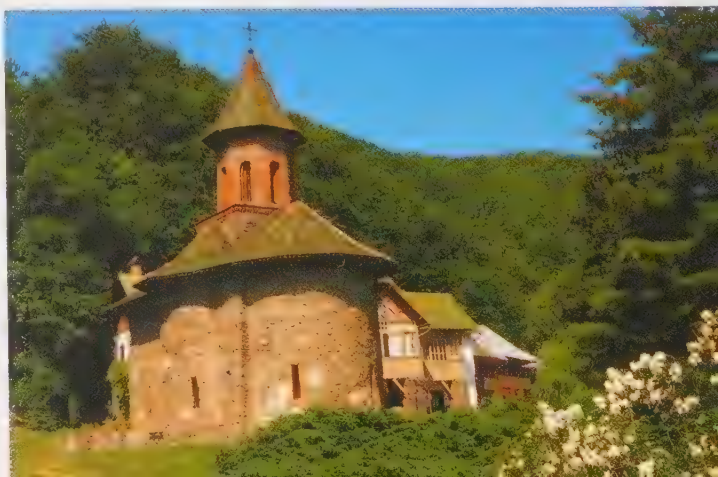
The author of the murals was an adept of the post-Brancoveanu style, as can be seen in the presence of exterior pictorial decorations after the model of the Brancoveanu monuments of Wallachia.

The iconostasis of the church was made in 1752, as witnessed by the inscription on an icon that belonged to it and is now in the altar apse, in which *the Virgin and Child* are depicted.

In the monastery collection, there are also other valuable icons, including twenty icons on glass dating from the twentieth century, belonging to various Transylvanian centres: Fagaras, Scheii Brasovului, Lancram.

The monastery church, view from the west the portal with the icon of the church's patron saint: *St John the Evangelist*

The church of *St John the Evangelist*, view from the south-east



The wooden churches of Budesti

First documentary mention: 1628 (Budesti-Josani), 1760 (Budesti-Susani), Budesti, Maramures county

The wooden church of Budesti-Josani, general view from the south-west

At Budesti, an old Romanian settlement, attested since the fourteenth century, there are two historical churches, regarded as the most representative of the wooden architecture of Maramures.

The first is the Church of *Budesti-Josani*, situated in the centre of the village. The plan is traditional, with a porch, narthex, vaulted nave and polygonal apse. The roof has double eaves, and the apse is detached and polygonal in form. The tower above the narthex is surrounded by four smaller turrets, a western influence on the architecture of Maramures.

The murals contain numerous valuable examples, including the icon of St John the Baptist, painted by Gheorghie, an artist who was trained in an area where Byzantine painting merged with elements of western art.

The icon screen dates from the seventeenth century, and numerous icons from it have been preserved: *the Virgin and Child*, *Christ Enthroned*, *St Paraschiva*, and many feast-day icons. The gold background with geometric relief, the period costumes introduced into some scenes, and the drawing of the figures all reveal the eclectic training of the painter.

In 1726, on the back of the seventeenth-century icon panels, Alexandru Ponehalschi painted another row of emperor icons, which can now be seen in the church, as well as a large number of feast-day icons.

The murals in the apse of the altar were painted by Ioan Opris, a Baroque painter, as recorded by an inscription on an icon in the altar, painted by the same author in 1812. On the vault of the apse can be seen a western-influenced depiction of *the Holy Trinity*, with God the Father dressed in white, holding an orb, Christ with the Cross, and the Dove.

Also in the apse, on the lateral walls, there can be seen *the Sacrifice of Abraham*, and in the lower register a series of Church Fathers: St Basil the Great, Saint John Chrysostom, Pope Leon, etc.

In the nave, the south wall has paintings only in the lower part, where the portrait of St Demetrios can be remarked, a saint often met in the churches of Maramures, while on the north wall there appear scenes from the Old Testament.

The second monument in Budesti is the Church of *St Nicholas-Susani*. It was built in 1760, as can be read in an inscription in the nave: "the church was painted by Alexandru Ponehalschi and he built this holy church to the glory of God and for the salvation of Christian souls, in the year 1760, November, tenth day".

The present church stands on the site of an older structure, proof of which can be seen in the emperor doors, which depict the Four Evangelists and can be dated, according to the inscription, to the year 1628.

Detail of the interior paintings: *the Fall* and *the Way of the Cross*

The plan is traditional, but there is a peculiarity in the fact that the narthex was elongated in the nineteenth century and for that reason the form of the church appears slightly different to the "classic" model, changing the proportions between length and breadth. The roof is two-tiered, and covers both the nave and the apse.

The most valuable part of the paintings is a group of sixteenth-century icons (feast-day icons of *the Nativity of Christ* and *the Purification of Our Lady*, and an icon of *St Paraschiva*), as well as an icon depicting *the Archangel Michael*, with visible Moldavian influences.

The murals, preserved in good condition, decorate the apse of the altar and the nave. On the south wall of the nave, there are scenes from the *Passion of Christ*. The original painting has inscriptions in Old Church Slavonic, but the restored decoration has Romanian inscriptions written in Cyrillic characters.

A rich collection of manuscripts and religious books from the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, icons on glass, carpets, documents, and furniture of great artistic value completes the treasury of this church.

The wooden churches of Ieud

First documentary mention: the Church on the Hill (seventeenth century), the Church of the Nativity (early eighteenth century)
Ieud, Maramures county.

The Church on the Hill, general view from the south-west

Contemporary documents attest an old church at Ieud in 1364, as well as a monastery that existed until the nineteenth century. The present Church on the Hill, dedicated to *the Dormition of the Theotokos*, dates from the seventeenth century, with alterations dating from the eighteenth century.

Lacking a porch, the church otherwise has the traditional plan of narthex, nave – where there are also choir stalls – and a polygonal altar. The narthex is separated from the nave by a wall of beams, with a door on the axis of the emperor doors. To the right and left, in the form of an arcade, there are three window openings.

The roof is two-tiered, and above the nave there is a tower with a belvedere and – usual for wooden architecture – an arrowhead pinnacle. The slopes of the roof terminate in a "swallow's tail".

The painting is well-preserved and covers the entire surface area of the church. The author is Alexandru Ponehalschi, a Maramures artist from the late eighteenth century, who painted numerous murals for wooden churches. The richness of the iconographic programme, the complexity of the compositional solutions, the eloquence of the figures, and the variety of the ornamental motifs confirm the fact that the murals are a mature work by the painter, later than other works. There is no certain date for the murals, and we have only a patron-saint icon with a inscription of donation dated 1782.

The style of the painter is strongly influenced by western art, both in terms of iconography, with a series of scenes that are Baroque in inspiration, and in decoration, with Renaissance motifs. In the apse of the altar there is a *Holy Trinity* in western style, with God the Father as a personage, and to the north there is *the Vision of St Peter of Alexandria*, two subjects not known to Byzantine painting.

In the nave there appears *the Passion of Christ*, in eighteen episodes, the most

The Church on the Hill, details from the murals of the narthex

complete and detailed depiction in the wooden churches of Maramures. The iconographic programme of the nave is completed by scenes linked to the lives of *Ss Demetrios, Barbara, Stephen, Elijah,* and *Simeon Stylite*.

In the narthex, there is a *Last Judgement* with *the Deisis* and *the Apostles on thrones* above the entrance. On the left are depicted hosts of monks at the gates of heaven and the weighing of souls. On the right of the west wall can be seen hell and the hosts of sinners, and Moses and the Jews. The south wall shows the three patriarchs, *Abraham, Jacob* and *Isaac*, holding in their arms the chosen. In the narthex there are also depictions of the lives of *St Paraschiva* and *St Juliana*, on the north wall.

Next to the Church on the Hill, the Church on the Flat, at Ieud, built in the early eighteenth century, is one of the most beautiful examples of Maramures architecture, possessing in its turn a rich collection of icons on wood and on glass.

The Church on the Hill, details from the painting of the nave: *Ss John, Elijah, and Enoch*; *the Entry into Jerusalem*

The Brancoveanu Monastery – Sambata de Sus

The monastery precincts
The church and the gate tower, general view from the south-east

The Brancoveanu Monastery of Sambata de Sus was founded by Constantine Brancoveanu in 1696 with the aim of strengthening Orthodoxy in Transylvania, but also as a testament to the unity of Romanians as a people and in their faith. After 1700, imposing buildings were erected around the church, after the model of those at Hurezi.

During the conquest of Transylvania by the Hapsburg Empire, and the persecution of Orthodox monasteries, the foundation of Brancoveanu was demolished, with only ruins remaining of the church. The Brancoveanu palace continued to be inhabited for a while by the descendents of the prince's family.

In 1962, Metropolitan Nicolae Balan began restoration of the church, and the architects sought to reproduce the initial form of the monument, rebuilding the parts destroyed over the centuries.

The tri-conch plan with a porch, enlarged narthex, nave and altar, is common to all the foundations of the Brancoveanu age. The rectangular porch has seven arcades in the form of broken arches, and the two posts at the corners, together with the walls above the arches, are extended by another four connected arches which support the calotte that covers the space.

On the exterior, a toothed band of bricks divides the white façade of the church in two. The vaulting is in a system of stepped, superposed arches, proper to the Brancoveanu style, although some researchers regard it as an adaptation of the methods used in the architecture of wooden churches. The stone decoration of the door and window frames, the pilasters and sculpted panels of the porch bear the mark of the Brancoveanu style to which the entire ensemble is indebted.

The eighteenth century painting has been preserved only in the nave, in a few large fragments. Setting out from these, the entire murals have been reconstructed, in five registers: martyrs and saints, scenes from the New Testament, prophets, and in the semi-calottes of the apses, the Resurrection and Transfiguration respectively. In the spire of the nave is depicted *Christ Pantocrator* and the *Angelic Liturgy* at its base.

In the narthex, on the west wall, there is a votive painting, and on the other walls, in three registers, there can be seen Saints and Martyrs, and various biblical scenes. In the porch, the murals are entirely new and comprise *the Last Judgement* and scenes from the Old Testament, alongside rich floral decorations.

The Brancoveanu-style complex encloses the old church, and includes a new church, chapel, belvedere, cells, and a library.

The porch of the church. West side, detail of *the Last Judgement*

The Church of the Archangels, Surdesti

The Church of the Archangels, view from the south-east

The Church of *the Archangels* in Surdesti was built in 1766 by master builder Ion Macarie for the Graeco-Catholic (Uniate) community of Surdesti, as is recorded by the inscription above the portal, decorated with rosettes and cable moulding.

It is a daring artistic achievement, remarkable for the imposing dimensions of the tower surrounded by four turrets. The Church of Surdesti is known as the tallest wooden structure in Romania, with the tower soaring fifty-four metres, while the total height of the structure from the ground up is seventy-two metres. Such a height could be achieved because the site in which the church is built is situated in a valley, in order to protect it from strong winds.

The porch on the west side was added later and has two rows of superposed arches, on the ground and first floors, in a composition of great decorative effect. The roof is tiered, with double eaves. In the portion contained between the eaves, there is a second row of windows, identical to those at the lower level. The oak beams are perfectly fitted, with a band of twisted rope in the middle.

It is interesting to know that the oak wood from which the church was built was left to dry and bleach for ten years. Restorers have discovered metal tie-rods that go from the tip of the tower to the foundations.

The interior was decorated with murals, painted by Stefan of Sisesti, as recorded in the apse of the altar: "This holy altar was painted in the reign of the Emperor Joseph, year of the Lord 1783. Painter Stefan." Stefan of Sisesti, an artist known for his rich work in the area, painted the altar apse and nave at Surdesti. The iconographic programme is similar to that in other churches, with *the Holy Trinity* depicted in the western manner, with *the Evangelists* and scenes from *the Apocalypse*. Also remarkable is a scene with *the Ascension of Elijah* in the nave.

It is supposed that the paintings of the iconostasis were also done by Stefan, the same as in the case of the church at Plopis, a village neighbouring Surdesti. It is a monumental achievement, with polychrome Baroque sculpture, icons with rich gold grounds, realistic personages, and accentuated volumetrics. The form of the iconostasis is unusual, with the panels being arranged in a pyramidal composition.

The scene of *the Last Judgement* in the narthex, characterised by western influences in style and composition, is by another hand.

Detail of the painting in the church: the Sun in a folk vision

The Church of the Archangels, Plopis

The wooden church of the village of Plopis was begun in 1789, to replace an older place of worship, and finished on 12 November 1811, as recorded in a document drawn up on the occasion of its consecration.

In 1910, the church was repaired and a balcony built on the west side. Relatively small in dimensions, the Church of Plopis is remarkable for its harmonious proportions, which make it one of the best-known religious constructions of Maramures. The master builder was, it is supposed, the same Ioan Macarie who also built the church in the neighbouring village of Surdesti.

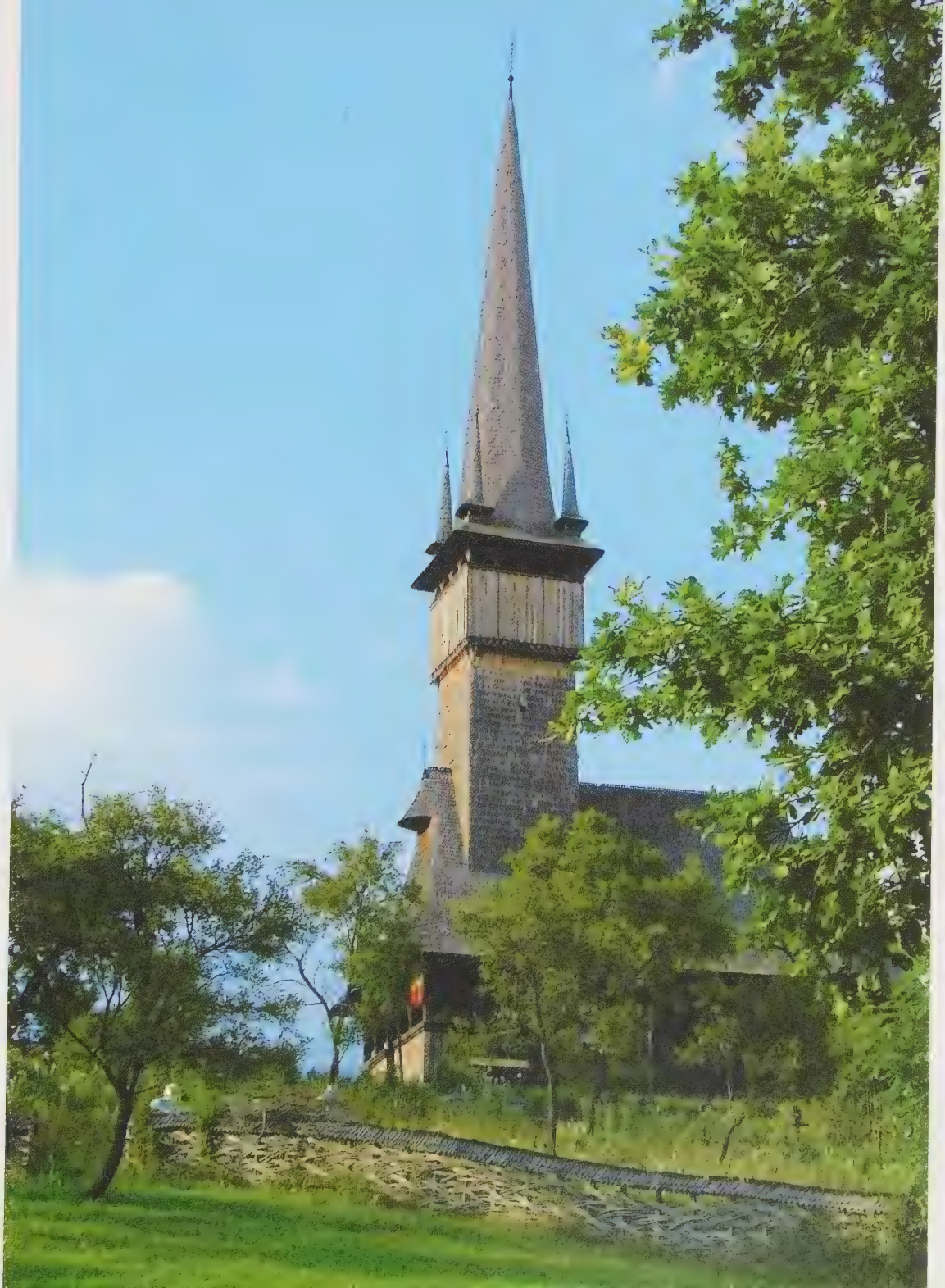
The plan of the church is the usual porch, narthex, nave and pentagonal altar. What is unusual is the height of the belfry, with its elongated belvedere and four turrets. The oak-beam walls rest on a stone plinth and are arranged in horizontal rows.

Of the murals, the church now preserves only fragments in the vault of the nave and on the icon screen of the altar. Since the church preserves an icon signed by Stefan of Sisesti and dated 1811, and the murals are stylistically analogous to other of his works, they may be attributed to the same author.

A complex figure, author of manuscripts that contain Christian teaching, whence he acquired a good knowledge of hagiographical texts, which helped him in elaborating his iconographic programmes, the artist achieves compositions that make felt the influence of western art, of the Baroque in particular, well represented in Transylvania at that time. His compositions have an often dramatic dynamism, and his personages are placed in landscapes, an innovation that heralds modern religious painting. The icons painted by Stefan of Sisesti are framed by Baroque mouldings. The iconostases of many churches in the Lapus area and around the city of Baia Mare, including the Church of Plopis, were made in this manner.

On the vault of the nave, there is a depiction of *the Holy Trinity*, with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove, surrounded by cherubim and seraphim, scenes from *the Apocalypse*, and *the Evangelists*, in iconographic schemes met in areas in which the painter was active in the late eighteenth century.

The Church of *the Archangels*, view from the south-west



Overall, the Church of *the Archangels* at Plopis is the result of the influence of Maramures wooden architecture, as regards its volumetry and outline, but also of Transylvanian architecture in its monumentality, both sources being interpreted in an original form, which gives the edifice its own unique identity.

Detail of the paintings in the nave: *The Descent from the Cross* (right), *the Holy Trinity*, and *the Prophet Elijah* (left)

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